The Politics of Manhood

Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)

Edited by Michael S. Kimmel

The Politics of

PROFEMINIST MEN
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MYTHOPOETIC
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Manhood

EDITED BY

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for

MICHAEL KAUFMAN

colleague, comrade, collaborator
and constant friend

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Preface

THIS BOOK HAS ITS ORIGINS IN REJECTION. Michael Kaufman and I had been working on an essay about Robert Bly's book *Iron John*, trying to engage critically with the ideas of the mythopoetic men's movement. A friend had mentioned that Kay Leigh Hagan was editing a book to be called *Feminists Respond to the Men's Movement*, and I thought that this might be an appropriate arena for Michael and me to publish such a critique.

Kay Leigh Hagan thought so too until her publisher insisted that the book's title be changed from "Feminists" to "Women." (She did manage a subtitle with the word "feminist" in it.) That meant we were out, so Michael and I searched for another outlet for the essay, which had by now grown quite long. *Feminist Issues*, a scholarly journal, published a shortened version, but friends and colleagues who read the essay pushed us to publish it in its entirety, and to consider the many other profeminist men who might be looking for a forum to respond to the visibility and popularity of the mythopoetic work.

When I became editor of *masculinities*, a new journal devoted to exploring the "problem" of gender identity from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, I invited a number of profeminist men to contribute essays representing their diverse disciplines. All of them—philosophers and theologians, psychologists and historians, sociologists and therapists—obliterated the dichotomy between scholar and activist. That journal issue formed the basis for this book.

Our encounter with the mythopoetic men's movement also began in rejection. Profeminist men categorically repudiated the work of the mythopoetic leaders, finding in it everything from antifeminist backlash and patriarchy

redux to racist appropriation, misleading theology, misguided anthropology, and misogynist political ideology. To most of us, the mythopoetic men's work reinscribed patriarchy as a political system by asserting men's need for *more* power and refusing to move beyond an individual version of empowerment.

Something was missing in this staking of turfs: the mythopoets were reaching large numbers of men, the same good, caring, mainstream men we profeminists had been trying to reach for years without much success. I knew that this book could not stand simply as the profeminist men's critical rejection of mythopoetic work. Therefore, I invited several of the mythopoetic leaders to respond to our writing, hoping that what began as rejection could begin to shift to a sorely needed dialogue between these two camps. The essays collected here significantly expand that common ground and more carefully demarcate the boundaries between our positions. Of course some essays focus more vigorously on boundary maintenance and others on exploring areas of agreement. But the net result is to push the outer limits of our political discourse into new terrain and open up possibilities for conversation and collaboration in unexpected ways.

Thus, though this book began in rejection, it has become a vehicle of inclusion. As a result of our correspondence, for example, Kay Leigh Hagan invited me to appear on *Donahue* when she was scheduled to square off against some mythopoetic men's movement leaders and fellow travelers. Since that time, she and I have worked together and developed a series of workshops and lecture-performances that we present at colleges and secondary schools around the country. In these, we explore the dilemmas and issues facing young women and men on campus today and, not incidentally, explore the ways in which feminist women and profeminist men can work as allies. I am honored to work with such a forthright and brilliant "feminist hothead" and deeply grateful for her ability to work with me to embody the wary alliances forming between feminist women and men.

And I am also thankful that the work on this book has brought me in touch with Robert Bly. His initial interest in the book and his careful and conciliatory response showed me how much room there is for dialogue. And subsequent contact has borne that out. We have now each agreed to try to provide venues for a public dialogue on men's issues, and I have invited him to be the keynote speaker at a forthcoming National Conference on Men and Masculinity, the annual profeminist men's conference sponsored by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS). I hope that my

initial critical response to his ideas in this book does not completely obscure my respect and admiration for his work.

Some of that badly needed dialogue among the various strains of men's work has already begun. Marvin Allen, who organizes the annual International Men's Conferences, has always believed that his conferences need a profeminist voice, in addition to the voices of other men he presents, and he has consistently invited me as a featured speaker. My public debate with Shepherd Bliss at U. C. Berkeley, organized by Bob Blauner, was bracing and arduous and showed me how much work there is yet to be done in creating meaningful dialogue grounded in mutual respect without defensiveness. I am grateful to Iona Mara-Drita for her debriefing sessions about that event, and discussions about the possibilities of political rapprochement, in the ensuing years.

As always, Michael Ames was an exemplary editor. He believed in the project from its inception and responded with engagement and enthusiasm. Michael is more than an editor; he is a trusted colleague and friend, as are my agents, Frances Goldin and Sydelle Kramer.

I also acknowledge the community of family, friends, and colleagues who provide the intellectual, emotional, and political foundation for my work. My thanks to: Amy Aronson, Tim Beneke, Bob Blauner, Bob Brannon, Judith Brisman, Harry Brod, Bob Connell, Barbara and Herb Diamond, Marty Duberman, Pam Hatchfield, Oystein Holter, Lars Jalmert, Sandi Kimmel, Ed Kimmel, David Levin, the late Marty Levine, Iona Mara-Drita, Mary Morris, Mike Messner, Tim Nonn, Larry O'Connor, Joe Pleck, Lillian and Hank Rubin, Don Sabo, Vic Seidler, Mitchell Tunick, and Eli Zal.

And to Michael Kaufman, to whom this book is dedicated. His friendship embodies the best of that potential confluence between the mythopoetic and the profeminist men's movements—a caring and nourishing emotional connection, an attention to process, and an uncompromising political vision. He is a constant source of love, support, and inspiration.

M.S.K.
New York City

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Introduction

MICHAEL S. KIMMEL

He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.
Dr. Johnson[1]

I.

"Do you want it tame or do you want it wild?" group leader Shepherd Bliss asks the assembled 60 or so men in a meeting room of a luxury hotel in Austin, Texas. Bliss is running a workshop on "Exploring Masculine Ground" at the First International Men's Conference in October 1991—a gathering of over 750 men from all over the country who have come together to retrieve their deep, wet, hairy, wild masculinity. There can be only one response to Bliss's question. "Wild!" shout the men in unison.

We're off to explore masculine ground, a "sacred masculine space" to be retrieved through ritual incantation and guided fantasy. This is my introduction to the actual work of the "mythopoetic" men's movement, and, although I have read most of the major texts, I am still somewhat surprised by how uncomfortable I feel. I am politically and intellectually skeptical, and emotionally uneasy. Such feelings are usually a tip-off that I need to pay greater attention to my experience, that I need to be more open to what is happening around me than usual. So I try to let it in.

We've begun our session with a West African chant of welcome, while we participants move around the room welcoming one another to our shared ritual space. I am unable to ignore that I am in a pricey hotel meeting room, with light grey wall to wall carpeting, buffed black metal track lighting, and

vertical blinds. And I can't ignore that these white men chanting and dancing to the beat of the conga drum have dreadful rhythm. Unable to suspend disbelief, I nod at a few of them.

Our first task in this workshop will be to explore our playful male natures through getting in touch with the earth, which Bliss invites us to do by taking off our shoes. "Feel the earth beneath your feet, the ground tilled by your ancestors," Bliss suggests. The carpeting is soft.

Bliss leads the group by suggesting what some of us might feel like doing. "Some of you might want to get on all fours and explore the ground with your hands as well," he suggests. All the men drop to their hands and knees to feel the earth tilled by their ancestors. "Some of you might feel some noises coming into your throats, the noises of male animals," he mentions. Everyone immediately starts growling, snorting. A few howls.

"Some of you might feel like moving around the room, getting in touch with other animals," Bliss predicts. Everyone is now moving slowly around the room, growling and snorting, occasionally bumping into one another. The most I can manage at this point is to remain on all fours, swaying back and forth and watching.

"Some of you might even feel yourselves recalling that most repressed sense, our sense of smell, and begin sniffing." Suddenly men are sniffing one another as they move through the room on all fours, resembling a group of suburban dogs in a large pen, checking each other out. Someone bumps into me and sniffs my rear. I turn and frown. He moves on to a better playmate.

Now Bliss escalates. "Some of you might find yourselves feeling like that most masculine of animals—the billy goat. Billy goats are very rambunctious and playful and they love to butt heads." Suddenly everyone is jumping around the room butting and sniffing and howling. Barely able to suppress a giggle, I kneel and sway silently.

After a few minutes of playing human bumper cars, Bliss closes the exercise, asking the assembled how they felt about it. Men shout out their emotional responses, which range from "free" to "playful," with no ambivalence or awkwardness, not a hint of self-consciousness. I develop a sense that these men know the routine, and can retrieve the appropriate emotion and behavior at will. This suspicion is confirmed by our next exercise.

Lights off, blinds drawn against the midday sun, Bliss invites us on a guided meditation to encounter our fathers. Lying on the floor, eyes closed, we move through several fantasy doors, down paths, and toward clearings in the fields until we encounter him. We are each invited to walk with our

fathers for a few steps, telling him the things we always wanted him to hear, and listening to the things he never told us.

I am smiling now, imagining myself at about age three, walking hand in hand with my father through Prospect Park to the zoo, which was our early Sunday morning ritual when I was a young child. Around me, I begin to hear sniffs and a few sobs. As the exercise continues, the sniffs deepen to sobs and the sobs descend further to deep heaving and crying.

I'm astonished—not at the outpouring of grief about father–son relations, because I am always aware that my close childhood connection with my father is quite unusual among my men's movement friends. But weren't these the same men who, three minutes earlier, were bounding around the room, butting heads and howling like billy goats? How could they move from exhilarating animal liberation to deep grief so quickly?

My introduction to the mythopoetic men's movement, then, is an immersion in a therapeutic culture in which emotions are constructed and displayed at appropriate moments. It's the same social construction of emotions that finds people, myself included, having what appears to be a fine day, feeling great, but then walking into a therapist's office and suddenly getting in touch with a deep well of pain and anger—all within two minutes of reciting the events of the day. How many of our emotions are *not* the products of recognizing a situation in which such emotions are appropriate and then deciding to deploy them?

I was fascinated nonetheless, perhaps because this kind of workshop and retreat has become so popular among men around the country (and so profitable for their organizers). After all, we social scientists had long held as axiomatic that men don't express their emotions, don't reveal their feelings, don't cry—most especially not around other men. And feminists had for decades urged men to open up and share their feelings. And here men were doing just that, or so it seemed. Is this what we'd been waiting for, the breakthrough moment when men finally let down their character armor and reveal themselves? It is, I admit, somewhat startling to be surrounded by men who appear not only to be in touch with great wells of feeling but willing to share them with utter strangers. Who wouldn't be interested?

Since that time, I have attended workshops, retreats, and conferences organized by the mythopoetic men's movement in an effort to understand the chord it has struck among American men, and the brief hold it exerted over media discussions of the contemporary "crisis" of masculinity. In particular, I have sought to set this "men's work" of the mythopoetic men's movement against the backdrop of the extraordinary efforts of feminist women to claim

their voices of anger, passion, and pain over the past thirty years. Is the mythopoetic men's movement what feminists have been yearning for, or is it part of the backlash against feminism, as journalist Susan Faludi suggests in her pathbreaking indictment, *Backlash*? Does the mythopoetic men's movement simply respond to *men's* needs, independent of the way the women's movement addresses women's needs, and is it, therefore, in a sense, indifferent to feminism? And how do the profeminist men, that diverse group of activists and scholars who consider themselves the allies of the women's movement, respond to the mythopoetic men's movement—its signal successes in reaching American men, the media's sarcastic dismissal of its more hokey rituals, and the ire it has inspired among feminist women? Those are the questions I have raised in this book.

II.

The mythopoetic men's movement, inspired and led by poet Robert Bly and his followers, seized the public imagination with the publication of Bly's best-selling book, *Iron John*, in 1990. Heralded by the media as the birth of a "men's movement," the phenomenon was seen as a moment when men were finally answering the claims of the women's movement. Suddenly, men across the country were trooping off to the woods on weekend retreats to drum, chant, be initiated, bond, and otherwise discover their inner wildmen or retrieve their deep masculinity.

As a media myth, the men's movement held the public's attention for its allotted fifteen minutes of fame, but then its minions quietly retreated to their lairs to nurse their wounds and sulk about how they were misperceived by the media. Of course, they were right: the media seemed to delight in deliberately distorting the aims of these movements, and reveling in the photo opportunities afforded by middle class, middle-aged white men in war paint and loin cloths, whooping and hollering like fantasized wildmen.

Still, there was a lot more to this movement, this "men's work" as they called it, than suggested by caustic dismissals. More than sweat lodges, animal noises, and hugs. And there was more to it than Robert Bly himself. The mythopoetic men's movement was as much a textual phenomenon as it was a ritual process. Books by other leaders quickly followed, with diagnoses of the male malaise and self-help strategies from a host of therapeutic traditions. Since I will discuss Bly's work at some length in an essay in this book, here I will comment only briefly on a few of the other works of the genre.

Sam Keen's *Fire in the Belly* was the only work other than *Iron John* to hit the best-seller lists. Michael Meade used stories and legends to make his case in *Men and the Water of Life;* therapists John Lee and Jed Diamond harnessed New Age insights and the recovery movement in their books, *At My Father's Wedding* and *The Warrior's Journey Home;* and therapists Aaron Kipnis and Marvin Allen used more mainstream group therapy insights in their books, *Knights without Armor* and *In the Company of Men.* All these latter books sold only modestly.

Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette became something of a publishing industry themselves, as their *King Warrior Magician Lover* was followed by what I came to call "the inner books"—four separate volumes on the "inner" king, warrior, magician, and lover. Their work is worth looking at for a moment, in part because it represents the worst of these texts and in part because it is typical of the genre.

Drawing on Jungian depth psychology, and mythology, Moore and Gillette, a Jungian therapist and mythologist, respectively, claimed these four as new archetypes for a conscious manhood. Moore and Gillette dilute Jung's evocative archetypal analysis (by way of Joseph Campbell) into a thin, watery soup in which the world's store of myths and legends is used illustratively to spice up an otherwise tasteless broth. In each volume, they take the reader on a breathless world tour, snatching bits of theory from Native American cosmology, and images of kingship from ancient Egypt, 7th century Tibet, the Aztecs, the Incans, the Sumerians—anyplace, in fact, that seems to fit their theory. King images included Chinese emperors, Egyptian pharaohs, Assyrian kings, all of whom, we read, were "committed to the preservation and the extension of a civilized, yet vigorously instinctual way of life" (*Inner King,* p. 156).

At times, their vision of kingship sounds rather grand: he is a protector, provider, procreator, who is capable of love, care, wisdom, embodying fulfillment, authenticity, and maturity (pp. 148, 207). Sometimes, he's simply grandiose, the fruit "of the cosmic phallus," and "the source of useful divine energy in the world" (pp. 127, 114). And sometimes, he sounds downright terrifying, "a warrior who enforces order within his kingdom and who may take military action to extend his kingdom" (p. 52). (Readers may note the cosmic appropriation of women's reproductive power in some of these images; at times a mother is usurped by a "more fertile" Queen, whose major duty seems to be standing by her man.)

Moore and Gillette believe that these archetypal elements of manhood are "hard wired components of our genetically transmitted psychic ma-

chine"—an apparently unself-consciously mechanical rhetorical flourish—which still must be activated and developed within culture. Despite the fact that we're born as kings, warriors, magicians, and lovers, then, we still have to be made—which should be good for book sales. Fortunately, the making of men is facilitated by the detritus of popular culture. A small crystal pyramid, they declare, can be a "useful portable icon," and the soundtracks to the films *Ben Hur* and *Spartacus* are excellent background music for activating archetypal awareness, and are "particularly evocative of King energy."

Such a descent from the pinnacles of cosmic awareness into the mundane world of a New Age Kmart does not obscure these gurus' frighteningly reactionary politics. Jimmy Carter, for example, is their example of a bad, weak king:

> Emblematic of his weak thinking was his absurd attempt to dramatize energy conservation by not lighting the national Christmas tree, an ancient symbol of eternal life and ongoing vigor. Of more consequence was his impotent reaction to the Iran hostage crisis.

Most mythopoetic men's movement leaders would be as appalled by such claims as I am. Bly, himself, after all, was one of the nation's most visible opponents of macho militaristic posturing during the Vietnam War; Shepherd Bliss recounts meeting Bly at an induction center, and how Bly helped Shepherd begin to resist the draft. And, more recently, Bly risked some of his cultural capital among his new male followers by visibly—and admirably—opposing Operation Desert Storm.

Sam Keen is probably the most antagonistic opponent of the false equation of militarism with masculinity. In his best-selling book, Keen rails against the "heartless functionaries" of the Reagan-Bush years. "A man who has not been morally anesthetized cannot have his eyes opened to unnecessary suffering, disease, and injustice without feeling outrage and hearing the call to arms" (p. 166). Keen relies more on Kenneth Burke and Gabriel Marcel than he does on Jung or mythic dieties, which makes him more ambivalent about questions of power.

And Keen does believe that men can reconnect with powerful adult women at the end of their journeys, although even he relies on simplified Freudian notions of separation from mother (here called "WOMAN" in all capital letters) as the essential first step on the masculine quest. But like several of the other theorists, Keen posits a facile symmetry between women's and men's experiences. Male and female, each in his or her sphere, living lives of meaning and coherence. Each gender is "half of a crippled

whole." Men get the "feeling of power" and women get the "power of feeling"; men get the "privilege of public action" while women get the "privilege of private being," as if these were equivalent. Or this:

> The wounds that men endure, and the psychic scar tissue that results from living with the expectation of being a battlefield sacrifice is every bit as terrible as the suffering women bear from the fear and reality of rape. (P. 47)

I wonder if he'd want to swap places with them.

Leaving these textual analyses, pop psychology bromides, mythological excursions and exhortations to heroic manhood, the mythopoetic men's movement did, after all, move a large number of men. Far more was involved than simply rhetorical musing, and far more than the mass media acknowledged. There were, for example, efforts to help men acknowledge and challenge their deep fears about connecting with other men, to enable men to explore some of the vitality they lost on their way to sober sensible American manhood, including a sense of joy and playfulness. There were outpourings of deeply felt grief and despair about fathers who had abandoned or abused their now-adult sons. These retreats helped men begin to dismantle the walls men build to make themselves feel strong, powerful, invincible—to shield themselves from vulnerability, pain, need. This work was enormously valuable. In a sense, these retreats invited men—as the women's movement had been asking, even cajoling, demanding, and urging, for several decades—to "get in touch with their feelings."

It was not necessarily a pretty sight, especially to feminist women who listened in horror as they learned what kinds of feelings were being released at these retreats. Undiluted rage against mothers, who were blamed for entering into incestuous relationships with their sons, thus preventing fathers from being close to their boys. Venomous anger at wives (mostly ex-wives, actually) who had expected their men to renounce boyhood pleasures and shoulder all family responsibilities to provide for their wives and children, only to grow first disgusted at the inability of their husbands to communicate and then vindictive during divorce proceedings that left the men childless, impoverished, and bitter. And seemingly incomprehensible fury at feminist women who have been agitating for transformation of institutional and interpersonal relations between women and men for over three decades. (I say incomprehensible because women, after all, brought these issues to men's attention in the first place. It has always seemed to me that we owe women an enormous debt of gratitude for caring about women enough to help them resist oppression, and caring about men enough to believe we were capable of change and to engage with us as we tried to enact it.)

The response of feminist women to this men's movement ranged from furious dismissal at the ways that masculine retreat could reproduce gender inequalities (if they're off in the woods, who's going to do the housework and childcare?) to a wary skepticism that such retreats could advance an agenda of mutual understanding or gender reconciliation. While the mainstream media's dismissals were more caustic and casual, feminist women engaged with the ideas of the movement, concluding that *Iron John* was, in the words of one journalist, "no gift to women." Susan Faludi's best-selling book, *Backlash*, listed Bly as one of the agents of the backlash. Kay Leigh Hagan's *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* presented feminist women's anger, frustration, and confusion about the mythopoetic men's movement. But even that book referred to Bly's groups as "the" men's movement. One of the most common cries from feminist women was "where are the men who support feminism?"

To listen to the media hype, and, to a lesser extent to the feminist women's response, the mythopoetic movement was *the* men's movement. The only sounds from men were the sounds of drumming and chanting in the woods. That there was *another* men's movement seemed to have escaped notice.

III.

For the past two decades, profeminist men have worked quietly and vigilantly to support feminist women, to help reorient masculinity to a more nurturing direction by embracing—not evading—a feminist political vision. Profeminist men work with batterers, convicted rapists, and sex offenders to stop the violence. We work with athletic teams and fraternities, and offer workshops in dorms on ways to prevent sexual assault on campus. We work with corporations to prevent sexual harassment and warm the "chilly climate" for women in the workplace. Profeminist men believe that men have a collective responsibility to work against the violence, injustice, and inequality that define and confine the lives of women in our society.

So how have profeminist men responded to the mythopoetic men's movement? Essentially, several themes were always present: political distress at the antifeminist rumblings that occasionally broke the surface at the mythopoetic men's gatherings; theoretical, academic criticisms of various anthropological, philosophical, and psychological assumptions; literary discomfort at the use of myths and archetypes. I shared these reservations, and more. I

found the mythopoetic men's work unsettling because it seemed "off," marked by a profound misdiagnosis of the current male malaise, and yet was enormously popular, apparently speaking to many more men than feminism ever had. I was, frankly, envious of their successes while shocked at some of their messages, which seemed to me to repudiate three decades of feminism and gay liberation. I wondered whether their success was related to that antifeminist message, or whether, perhaps, it was independent of it, and whether a profeminist message could be harnessed to their retreats.

I invited a number of profeminist men to respond to the work of the mythopoetic men's movement in an effort to bring these critiques together in coherent form. When I published some of these in *masculinities* (1993, vol 1, no. 3–4), a scholarly journal I edit, I hoped that these essays would provoke dialogue, debate, and discussion between mythopoetic and profeminist men in the areas on which we agreed and disagreed. I then invited several of the most visible leaders of the mythopoetic men's movement to respond to these essays, in a sense, to take up the challenge and dialogue with us.

Robert Bly was the first to respond, promising me an essay and also inviting me to participate with him on some public dialogues about these issues. Acceptances followed from Marvin Allen, Onaje Benjamin, Shepherd Bliss, Jed Diamond, Aaron Kipnis, and John Lee, who later dropped out. Initially, Sam Keen accepted as well. His letter chided me for suggesting there is division between profeminist and mythopoetic men, and indicated that he was "a bit tired of the 'men's' issue thing." He also pleaded "not guilty to being a mythopoetic type." In my response, I mentioned that several of the authors in the book had included him in the genre, and that this might be a good opportunity both to disavow the mythopoetic label and to explicate his position more clearly. I sent him a few articles that made explicit use of his book, and he called me back, indicating that he would definitely contribute something to clarify his position. All of my subsequent letters went unanswered, and I never heard from him again.

IV.

This book, then, gathers together the writings of profeminist men on the mythopoetic men's movement and the responses by some of the leaders of the mythopoetic men's movement to our critique. It is a necessary first step toward open discussion and dialogue. But it is incomplete. It begins dialogue among men about the appropriate models for masculinity at the turn of the

new century, a debate about the origins of the current crisis of masculinity, and a series of responses to what should be done about it. More than that, it is an open dialogue with feminist women, a response to their responses, an effort to broaden the discussion of the ways we can collectively transform sexist society. In those two dialogues, a new set of voices emerges into the current national discussion of the transformation of masculinity.

I believe that the mythopoetic men's movement does valuable work in breaking down men's isolation from one another, and giving permission for men to experience deep feelings. Here I part with some profeminist contributors, who claim that even these apparent benefits are suspect. I also believe that, unless these potentially counterhomophobic activities are harnessed to a larger vision of gender and sexual equality by embracing difference, the mythopoetic men's movement will remain a feel-good mass therapy. And in the current backlash against women, a movement devoted *only* to men feeling better about themselves as men cannot help but oppose sexual equality and gender justice.

I see the mythopoetic men's movement as being at a crossroads. Will it continue to honor men's feelings of powerlessness, pitting women against me, straight men against gay men, and white men against men of color? Or will it join with those of us who have already committed ourselves to those struggles for equality as a way of redefining masculinity? Can the mythopoetic men's movement claim the rich historical legacy of profeminist men who have publicly stood up for equality? Or will they continue to run away?

Watching the movie *Wolf*, I was again reminded that the descent to a primal, natural, animal-like masculinity can cut either way. For the Jack Nicholson character, the descent toward animality permits reconciliation of his public persona, that of a somewhat stuffily effete book editor, with a fierce, heroic, and sensual nature that civilized discourse had all but completely sapped. (Even his vision gets sharper.) But for James Spader, as his rival, the descent brings out a deeper cruelty, less concealed by social convention. Nicholson uses his descent to elevate his manhood, while Spader uses his descent as an invitation to unchecked depravity. Nicholson becomes a passionate lover, Spader a rapist.

The men of the mythopoetic men's movement also face a choice—not as draconian, perhaps, nor as starkly drawn. They can use their newfound and hard-fought insights to make the world better for others, connecting themselves to those political movements—the women's movement, the gay and lesbian movement, the civil rights movement—that seek to claim the voices they have traditionally been denied. Or they can retreat, in defensive anger,

protecting themselves against those who might challenge their gender, race, and sexual privilege. In short, I believe, the mythopoetic men's movement can become either profeminist or antifeminist. But it cannot remain neutral, indifferent, impartial, and unengaged. It can witness these political struggles neither from the sidelines nor, as some of its leaders suggest, from the "woods" in their own ritual space, the last refuge against the oncoming tide.

NOTE

1. Attributed to Dr. Johnson in James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, edited by G. B. Hill, revised by L. F. Powell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), volume 2, p. 435.

I

CONCEPTUAL CRITIQUES

Weekend Warriors: The New Men's Movement

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Held up as the end-all of organization leadership, the skills of human relations easily tempt the new administrator into the practice of a tyranny more subtle and more pervasive than that which he means to supplant. No one wants to see the old authoritarian return, but at least it could be said of him that what he wanted primarily from you was your sweat. The new man wants your soul.

William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*[1]

ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, men have been gathering in search of their manhood. Inspired and led by poet Robert Bly, the *eminence grise* of this new men's movement—and whose book, *Iron John*, topped the best-seller lists for more than 35 weeks in 1991—dozens of therapists and "mythopoetic" journeymen currently offer workshops, retreats and seminars to facilitate their "gender journey," to "heal their father wounds" so that they may retrieve the "inner king," the "warrior within," or the "wildman."[2] And hundreds of thousands of men have heeded the call of the wildman, embraced this new masculinity, and become weekend warriors.

The movement has certainly come in for its share of ridicule and derision. Countless magazine articles, newspaper stories, and even several TV sitcoms have portrayed the movement as nothing more than a bunch of white, upper-middle-class professionals chanting and dancing around bonfires, imitating Native American rituals, and bonding. Recently, feminist women have indicated their suspicions that this men's movement is patriarchy with a New Age face, a critique that is explicitly political. To date, the new men's movement has received virtually no serious analytic scrutiny from men. This essay is an attempt to make sense of that movement, to subject the new men's movement to serious analysis.

Like any other social movement, the new men's movement can best be examined through a set of analytic frames, each designed to illuminate a specific part of the movement. Through an analysis of the major texts of the movement, as well as through participant observation at several men's retreats, we will attempt to make sense of this phenomenon. Specifically, we will want to pose four sets of questions:

1. *Historical and Political Context.* What specific historical conditions have given rise to this new men's movement? What does the movement have to do with the women's movement? Why now?
2. *Social Composition.* To what specific groups of men does this new men's movement appeal? Why these men? What is the class, racial, and ethnic composition of these weekend retreats?
3. *Ideology of Masculinity.* What is the vision of social change that the new men's movement embraces? From what sources do they derive their vision? What is their diagnosis of the causes of malaise among contemporary men?
4. *Organizational Dynamics.* What are the organizational vehicles by which the men's movement will accomplish its aims? What does the evocation of ritual, chanting, drumming, and initiation mean in the context of the movement?

By exploring these four aspects of the mythopoetic men's movement, we will be able to assess the consequences of the movement, both for men and women individually, and for the larger framework of other movements for social change. In talking about this men's movement, we see it as distinct from the pro-feminist men's movement, even though at least some of the men attracted to Robert Bly also consider themselves pro-feminist. It's also distinct from the self-consciously anti-feminist and misogynist men's rights movement although, again, some other mythopoetic men wander into this camp.

THE MEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE REAL WORLD

Contexts and Composition

The first two dimensions of the new men's movement can be fairly briefly summarized. In the past two decades, masculinity has been increasingly seen as in "crisis," a widespread confusion over the meaning of manhood. (Much

of this discussion applies specifically to the United States and Canada, although there are some points of contact with Australia and western Europe.) From the earliest whines of "men's liberation" in the mid-1970s, to the current "Great American Wimp Hunt," and the preoccupation with the diets and fashion tastes of "Real Men," questions of the definitions of masculinity have been contested. That men are confused over the meaning of masculinity has become a media cliche, and hundreds of advice books and magazine columns today advise men on gender issues.

The contemporary crisis of masculinity has structural origins in changing global geo-political and economic relations, and in the changing dynamics and complexion of the workplace. Our traditional definitions of masculinity had rested on economic autonomy: control over one's labor, control over the product of that labor, and manly self-reliance in the workplace. The public arena, the space in which men habitually had demonstrated and proved their manhood, was racially and sexually homogenous, a homosocial world in which straight, white men could be themselves, without fear of the "other." Economic autonomy, coupled with public patriarchy, gave men a secure sense of themselves as men. And if they should fail, they could always head out for the frontier, to the boundaries of civilization, where they could stake a new claim for manhood against the forces of nature.

That world is now gone. The transformation of the workplace—increased factory mechanization, increased bureaucratization of office work—means that fewer and fewer men experience anything resembling autonomy in their work. This century has witnessed a steady erosion of economic autonomy; from 90 percent of U.S. men who owned their own shop or farm at the time of the Civil War to less than 1 out of 10 today. The continental frontier was declared closed at the turn of the century, and since that time we have invented a succession of frontiers to take its place—from the Third World, to outer space (the "final frontier"), to the corporate "jungle." The current global restructuring finds many former outposts on that frontier demanding inclusion into the economy; decolonization and movements for regional or ethnic autonomy destabilize American hegemony.

Perhaps nothing has had a larger cultural impact in this crisis of masculinity than the recent rise of the women's movement, and also the gay and lesbian movement. By the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had already challenged the dominant view that the public arena and the workplace were virtually preserves for whites. With the rise of the women's movement, there was a challenge to older and even more fundamental beliefs about men's place in society. Old certainties and gender divisions were challenged, a

process augmented by the gay and lesbian movement, which challenged the heterosexual assumptions of those old gender arrangements.

Although these economic, political and social changes have affected all different groups of men in radically different ways, perhaps the hardest hit *psychologically* were middle-class, straight, white men from their late twenties through their forties. For these were the men who not only inherited a prescription for manhood that included economic autonomy, public patriarchy, and the frontier safety valve, they were also men who believed themselves *entitled* to the power that attended upon the successful demonstration of masculinity. These men experienced workplace transformation as a threat to their manhood, and the entry of the formerly excluded "others" as a virtual invasion of their privileged space.

As a result, many middle-class, white, middle-aged heterosexual men—among the most privileged groups in the history of the world—do not experience themselves as powerful. Ironically, although these men are everywhere in power, that aggregate power of that group does not translate into an individual sense of feeling empowered. In fact, this group feels quite powerless. Entitled to partake in the traditional power of masculinity, these men feel besieged by new forces outside of their control, and somewhat at a loss as they observe the women in their lives changing dramatically while they feel increasingly helpless.

It should come as no surprise, then, to observe that the overwhelming majority of the men who are currently involved in the new men's movement are precisely middle class, middle aged, white and heterosexual. The men who feel most besieged, and who have the resources with which to combat that siege, are the most frequent weekend warriors. Attendance of men of color ranged, over a variety of retreats and conferences in various parts of the United States that we attended, from zero to less than 2 percent, while never greater than 5 percent of the attendees were homosexual men. The majority of the men are between 40 and 55, with about 10 percent over 60 and about 5 percent younger than 30. Professional, white collar and managerial levels were present in far greater proportion than blue collar and working class men, in part because the expense of the weekend retreats (usually $200 to $500 for a weekend) or the day-long seminars ($50 to $200) make the retrieval of deep manhood a journey open only to the economically privileged.

The men's movement is the cry of anguish of privileged American men, men who feel lost in a world in which the ideologies of individualism and manly virtue are out of sync with the realities of urban, industrialized, secular

society. It retells the tales of over-dominant mothers and absent fathers who have betrayed the young boy and deprived him of his inheritance of a sense of personal power. The men's movement taps a longing for the lost innocence of childhood, and a cry for certainty about the meaning of manhood in a society where both men's power and rigid gender definitions are being challenged by feminism. These themes, trumpeted by Bly and his followers, link up with the experiences of predominately white, heterosexual, middle-class and middle-aged readers who have made his book and the movement which surrounds it such a success. Movement leaders speak directly and with compassion to men's uneasiness and discomfort: eloquently to their grief about their relationships with their fathers, to their despair over their relationships with women, their pain and sense of powerlessness and isolation. What exactly does the men's movement say? What is its diagnosis of the masculine dilemma?

The Search for the Deep Masculine

The men's movement has many different voices, drawing on many different traditions. Some rely entirely on Greek and Roman mythologies for images of heroic manhood; others use Jungian archetypes or Eastern religions as the foundation for new visions of masculinity. But certain themes are constantly sounded, especially essentialist assumptions about gender distinctions, a contemporary diagnosis of feminization of American manhood, the search for lost fathers (and father figures), and a vision of retrieval of heroic archetypes as models for men. Bly's argument rests on the fusion of (1) a psychological analysis of Jungian archetypes, in which a retelling of fairy tales and myths serve as illustrations; (2) a historical interpretation of the progress of industrialization and modernization on men's lives; (3) an anthropological survey of non-industrial cultures and their rituals of initiating men into society and providing secure identities for adult men. These are sandwiched between a political critique of contemporary men, and a vision for the future of manhood that reclaims lost rituals and grounds men's identities more securely. Since *Iron John*, based on an explication of a Grimm fairy tale, is the touchstone of the men's movement, we can explicate its ideology by deconstructing its seminal text. The fable goes as follows:

> Once upon a time, a hunter volunteers to go into the woods and find out why the King had lost several of his men. The hunter returned with a Wild Man, who had lived at the bottom of a lake, and had apparently been devouring the

> others. The King put the Wild Man in a cage in the courtyard. One day, the King's 8 year old son was playing near the cage with a ball. The ball rolled into the cage. To get it back, the Wild Man made the boy promise to get the key to his cage and free him. The key was under the boy's mother's pillow. The boy stole the key from under his mother's pillow and opened the cage. The Wild Man walked off into the woods with the boy. (They have set each other free.)
>
> In the woods with Iron John, the boy fails to follow Iron John's instructions, so he is sent off to work, first as a cook's apprentice, later as a gardener. Here, he meets the daughter of the king. He goes off to war, proving himself in battle, although he doesn't take credit for it. At a post-bellum festival, he catches three golden apples tossed by the king's daughter in a competition, but the boy rides off in a different suit of armor, after catching each one. Eventually, he is brought before the king and asks for the girl's hand in marriage. The big wedding celebration is suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a great King, who walks up to young man and embraces him. "I am Iron John, who through an enchantment became turned into a Wild Man. You have freed me from that enchantment. All the treasure that I won will from now on belong to you."

Bly uses the Iron John fable to several ends—to suggest manhood as a quest, to heal the split between the dutiful son and the Wild Man, to imply that the son's healing of his own wound will simultaneously heal the father's wounds, to suggest the possibilities of manly nurture and initiation of men by other men, and, most centrally, to launch his critique of contemporary men.

The New Man as Wimp

The mythopoetic men's movement agrees that something is dramatically wrong with American manhood; the "the male of the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free. He's a nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with," Bly writes (p. 2). The evidence of feminization is abundant; in an earlier essay Bly pointed to

> the percentage of adult sons still living at home has increased; and we can see much other evidence of the difficulty the male feels in breaking with the mother: the guilt often felt toward the mother; the constant attempt, usually unconscious, to be a nice boy; lack of male friends; absorption in boyish flirtation with women; attempts to carry women's pain, and be their comforters; efforts to change a wife into a mother; abandonment of discipline for 'softness' and 'gentleness'; a general confusion about maleness.[3]

The new man is incapable of standing up to women, so eager is he to please. "If his wife or girlfriend, furious, shouts that he is 'chauvinist,' a 'sexist,' a

'man,' he doesn't fight back, but just takes it" (p. 63). In short, the new man turns out to be a wimp; he is the problem, not the solution, and manhood needs to be rescued from such sensitive Mama's boys.

The men's movement assumes a deep, essential manhood, and its retrieval is the solution. Manhood is seen as a deeply seated essence, an ingrained quality awaiting activation in the social world. Intrinsic to every man, manhood is transhistorical and culturally universal. "The structure at the bottom of the male psyche is still as firm as it was twenty thousand years ago," observes Bly (p. 230), while Moore and Gillette claim that the deep elements of manhood have "remained largely unchanged for millions of years."[4] And it is the exact opposite of the essence of woman:

> Male and female make up one pair. . . . One can feel the resonance between opposites in flamenco dancing. Defender and attacker watch each other, attractor and refuser, woman and man, red and red. Each is a pole with its separate magnetic charge, each is a nation defending its borders, each is a warrior enjoying the heat of extravagant passion, a distinguished passion which is fierce, eaglelike, mysterious. (Bly, pp. 174–75)

Though masculinity is seen as an inner essence diametrically opposed to femininity, individual men do not inherit manhood through their biological composition. Manhood must be achieved. And it must be validated by other men; women cannot validate manhood. "It takes work to become a man," write Moore and Gillette (1992, p. 234). "Achieving adult male status requires personal courage and the support and nurturing of older men." It is the task of the larger society to facilitate this achievement, because when the actualization of manhood is thwarted, dire consequences result. "If a culture does not deal with the warrior energy . . . it will turn up outside in the form of street gangs, wife beating, drug violence, brutality to children, and aimless murder" (p. 179)—all of which sounds remarkably similar to the words of right-wing ideologue George Gilder (1974).[5] The route to manhood is perilous, but the consequences of failure are far worse.

What then are the appropriate stages of manhood, the stages that each man should follow if he is to activate his deep, essential masculinity? In sum, there are four stages of manhood, each with an accompanying scholarly and mythical apparatus to facilitate its passage: (1) bonding with the mother and breaking away from her (psychological level); (2) bonding with the father and breaking away from him (historical critique of modernity); (3) finding the male mother (anthropological reclamation of initiation ritual); (4) the reentry into adult heterosexual union (reproduction of heterosexuality, gender roles). Each of these is central to the mythopoetic vision.

BAD DEALS FROM MOMS AND DADS

The men's movement embraces a traditional, and rather conservative, rendering of psychoanalytic theory. The task of becoming men requires a break from our initial identification with the mother. In today's world this isn't simple; men's repudiation of the feminine is thwarted. More than one man "today needs a sword to cut his adult soul away from his mother-bound soul" (Bly, 1990, p. 165). There are two reasons why men have not broken the bond with mother. First, mothers won't let them, remaining locked in somewhat incestuous flirtations with their sons. (This is why the young boy must steal the key from under his mother's pillow—she will not voluntarily give it, and thus him, up.) Second, fathers are not there to facilitate the transfer of identity. Separation from mother is traditionally facilitated by father who provides a role model for his son and presents to him an alternative to femininity. But sadly, men are not doing their job as fathers. It's not entirely men's fault but rather a consequence of modern society. Here, the men's movement adopts a somewhat mythic history of the Industrial Revolution and its consequences for male development.

If we state it as another fairy tale, this myth goes something like this: Once upon a time, the division of labor was fully gendered, but both father and mother remained closely bound to the home and children. Fathers were intimately involved with the development of their sons. As artisans, they brought their sons to their workplace as apprentices; the sons had an intimate appreciation for the work of the father. But the Industrial Revolution changed all that; the separation of spheres imprisoned women in the home, as feminists have long argued, and it exiled men from the home (a fact curiously absent from feminist analysis, Bly seems to think). Now fathers are nowhere to be found in the lives of their sons. The "love unit most damaged by the Industrial Revolution has been the father–son bond," writes Bly (1990, p. 19). This, mythopoets label the "father wound."

The consequences of the father wound are significant, including adolescent male rebellion:

> The son does not bond with the father, then, but on the contrary a magnetic repulsion takes place, for by secret processes the father becomes associated in the son's mind with demonic energy, cold evil, Nazis, concentration camp guards, evil capitalists, agents of the CIA, powers of world conspiracy. Some of the fear felt in the 60s by young leftist men ("never trust anyone over 30") came from that well of demons; (Bly, 1982, p. 45)

feminism, since father absence:

> may severely damage the daughter's ability to participate good-heartedly in later relationships with men. Much of the rage that some women direct to the patriarchy stems from a vast disappointment over this lack of teaching from their own fathers; (1990, p. 97)

and feminist-inspired male bashing:

> The emphasis placed in recent decades on the inadequacy of men, and the evil of the patriarchal system, encourages mothers to discount grown men. . . . Between twenty and thirty percent of American boys now live in a house with no father present, and the demons have full permission to rage. (1990, pp. 86, 96)

(The reader is left to figure out exactly which demons those might be.)

The absence of the father leaves a void in the center of every adult man, a psychic wound that yearns for closure. Without healing the father wound, men are left only with mother, left literally with women teaching them how to become men. But, Bly and his followers argue, only men can really teach men to be authentic men, validate masculinity, and provide a male with a secure sense that he has arrived at manhood.

Masculinity as Praxis

Fortunately, the men's movement has discovered such a mechanism, developed in non-industrial cultures over thousands of years, that can substitute for the absent father and provide the young male with a secure grounding in gender identity. It is the male initiation ritual, symbolically reproduced by thousands of weekend warriors across the nation, men who flock to male-only retreats to tell stories, beat drums, and recreate initiation rituals from other cultures. These non-industrial cultures are seen as providing a mechanism for young boys to successfully pass through an arduous rite, at the end of which he is secure in his manhood. It is never again a question. There is no "man problem."

In each case, initiation centers around separation from the world of women and rebirth into the world of adult men. This is achieved in spatially separate men's huts or retreats, and during specific temporally demarcated periods. Like baptism, there is symbolic death of the boy (the profane self, the self born of woman) and rebirth. Bly recalls one Australian culture in which the adult men construct a twenty to thirty foot long tunnel of sticks and bushes, and push the young boys through, only to receive them with much ceremony at the other end, having now been reborn "born out of the

male body" (Bly, 1982, p. 47). Or the Kikiyu, who take young boys who are hungry after a day-long fast and sit them down by a fire in the evening. Each adult male cuts his arm and lets the blood flow into a gourd which is passed to the young boys to drink "so that they can see and taste the depth of the older males' love for them." This represents a shift from "female milk to male blood" (Bly, 1982, p. 47).

The purpose of the initiation has a long theoretical legacy. Mircea Eliade argued that initiation "is equivalent to a revelation of the sacred, of death, of sexuality, and of the struggle for food. Only after having acquired these dimensions of human experience does one become truly a man."[6] And sociologist Max Weber commented on the consistency of these ritual structures in his epic *Economy and Society*. "He who does not pass the heroic trials of the warrior's training remains a 'woman' just as he who cannot be awakened to the supernatural remains a 'layman'," he wrote.[7]

At the conclusion of the initiation ritual, the young male is socially a man. He has been prepared psychically by separation from mother and identification with father, and sociologically by leaving the individual father and becoming one of the band of brothers. Now he is ready to reconnect with woman in spiritual and sexual union, seeking joyous connection, not neurotic demonstration of manhood nor narcissistic self-pleasuring. He is ready for marriage.

Thus, the spiritual quest for authentic and deep manhood reproduces traditional norms of masculinity and femininity, of heterosexuality, and, in our culture, monogamous marriage; in short, the men's movement retrieval of mythic manhood reproduces the entire political package that Gayle Rubin called the "sex-gender system."[8] In the present, as in the mythical past, the demonstration of manhood becomes associated with a relentless repudiation of the feminine. Since, in our era, the father's absence makes this separation difficult, weekend retreats offer an emotional substitute for real fathers. At these retreats, men can heal their "father wound"—the grief men feel that their fathers were not emotionally or physically present in their lives. They can feel a sense of intimacy and connectedness to other wounded and searching men. They can discover the depths of their manhood. This is the men's movement's promise for masculine renewal.

FALSE PROMISES

It is a false promise. In this section of this essay, we will develop a broad-based critique of the mythopoetic men's movement, bringing to bear a vari-

ety of social scientific literatures to understand the limitations of each phase of the men's movement's promise. We will discuss (1) the limitations of essentialism; (2) the psychoanalytic misdiagnosis; (3) the anthropological context of male bonding; (4) the historical search for masculinist solutions; and (5) the sociology of regression. We will conclude with an analysis of the value of the feminist critique of masculinity as a blueprint for men's transformation.

The Construction of Essentialism

The central assumption in the mythopoetic vision is an ontological essential difference between women and men. For all theorists of the movement, the male-female difference is not socially constructed and does not vary cross-culturally. Whether based on Jungian archetypes or bowdlerized readings of Eastern religions, or the selection of myths and fairy tales, the men's movement claims that men and women are virtually different species. The mythopoetic search for the "deep masculine" and the psychically "hairy man" is a search for something that exists as a natural, biological reality. Moore and Gillette claim that the central elements of manhood are the "hard wired components of our genetically transmitted psychic machine"—without a hint of awareness of how gendered and mechanistic is their language (1992, p. 33).

The men's movement, therefore, misses one of the central insights of social science—that gender is a product of human action and interaction, that our definitions of masculinity and femininity are the products of social discourse and social struggle. Being a man is distinct from being biologically male. Essentialism leads the men's movement to adopt a version of manhood that corresponds rather neatly with our society's dominant conception of masculinity—man as warrior and conqueror—and to suggest that this represents the quintessence of manhood. Thus Moore and Gillette venerate Ronald Reagan's courage during the hostage crisis and vilify Jimmy Carter as a wimp: "Emblematic of his weak thinking was his absurd attempt to dramatize energy conservation by not lighting the national Christmas tree, an ancient symbol of eternal life and ongoing vigor. Of more consequence was his impotent reaction to the Iran hostage crisis" (1990, p. 167). That this definition of masculinity rests on men's gender power does not have to enter into the equation—rather, the mythopoetic warrior's quest is to rediscover his masculine core and experience a bond with his psychic ancestors.

Healing the Mother Wound

These essentialist assumptions lead Bly and others to an inversion of feminist psychoanalytic insights of the past three decades. Following Chodorow, Dinnerstein, Rubin, Benjamin, and others,[9] we think that the core psychological problem of gender formation for men is, in a sense, not too little separation from mother but too much. In societies where men do little parenting, both young boys and girls have a primary identification with mother. However, the establishment of a boy's identity and his individuality is a psychic process in which the boy struggles to renounce identification with mother, and the nurturing she represents, and embrace identification with father. It is a process with enormous costs. "Boys come to define themselves," writes Chodorow, "as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (pp. 174 and 169). Such a process has political ramifications:

> Dependency on his mother, attachment to her, and identification with her represent that which is not masculine; a boy must reject dependence and deny attachment and identification. Masculine gender role training becomes more more rigid than feminine. A boy represses those qualities he takes to be feminine inside himself, and rejects and devalues women and whatever he considers to be feminine in the social world. (Chodorow, p. 181)

Manhood is defined as a flight from femininity and its attendant emotional elements, particularly compassion, nurturance, affection, and dependence. This does not mean that men completely lose these capacities. Rather it means that these things become more-or-less muted and often experienced as inimical to male power. Though the definition of manhood varies by class and culture, by era and orientation, our hegemonic definitions of masculinity are based on independence, aggression, competition, and the capacity to control and dominate.[10] This helps to explain men's rage at women, men's rage at their own dependency and weaknesses, and the rage of so many men at gay men (whom they misperceive as failed men).

As a result, most men are afraid of behavior or attitudes that even hint at the feminine. So many men are willing, even eager, to engage in all manner of high-risk behavior, lest they be branded wimps or tainted with the innuendo that they might be homosexual. The whole quest for masculinity is a life-long set of high-risk behaviors. The costs to men may be on a different level than the costs to women, but men's lived experience involves consider-

able alienation and pain. Men remain emotionally distant, aggressively risk-taking, preoccupied with power, status, money, accumulating sexual partners, because these are all badges of manhood. We call this obsessive flight from the feminine the "mother wound." Through the mother wound the boy internalizes the categories of gender power of a patriarchal society. The social project of suppressing women and their social power is internalized and unconsciously recreated in the psychic life of the young boy.

The men's movement claims that the root psychological problem for men is that we have not yet cut our psychic umbilical cord. By contrast, we see the problem as the opposite: the relentlessness by which we consciously and unconsciously demonstrate that the cord is cut. From this difference comes the men's movement's prescription for retrieving manhood: to wrench men away from the home, off to the woods with other men, into a homosocial space where men can validate one another's masculinity. It's a feel-good response, but it does little to address the roots of the problem of either a father or a mother wound. Men breaking down their isolation and fears of one another is important, but to get to the core of the problem requires men to play a role in domestic life through equal and shared parenting. Boys would experience men as equally capable of nurture, so that they would not associate nurturing with only one gender, leaving "people of both genders with the positive capacities each has, but without the destructive extremes these currently tend toward" (Chodorow, p. 218). Men would find their defensive shells pierced by affection and interdependence, thus transforming the definition of masculinity itself, no longer "tied to denial of dependence and devaluation of women." And politically, shared parenting would "reduced men's needs to guard their masculinity and their control of social and cultural spheres which treat and define women as secondary and powerless" (p. 218).

Perhaps more than anything else, it is through the social practices of parenting that men may connect with the emotional qualities that they have rejected in real life—nurturing, compassion, emotional responsiveness, caring. These emotional resources will not be adequately discovered reading a book or stomping through the woods hugging other men who have taken totemic animal names. They are to be found in the simple drudgery of everyday life in the home. Cleaning the toilet, ironing, or washing dishes are not romantic—you don't have to be a "golden eagle" to keep your nest clean. But they are the everyday stuff of nurture and care. They are skills that are learned, not received by divine revelation after howling at the moon in the forest. We need more Ironing Johns, not more Iron Johns.

Although men's entry as equal parents becomes a key part of intergenerational solutions, it isn't only biological fathers who can rediscover their capacity to nurture. Gay men, largely in response to the AIDS crisis, have developed inspiring formal and informal social networks of caregiving, nurturance, and support.

The route to manly nurture is through doing it in the everyday way that women currently nurture in our society, the ways our mothers—and not usually our fathers—nurtured us. If mothers embody responsibility, care, and nurture, why would Bly suggest that our project is to reject mother and run away from her? Men need to heal the mother wound, to close the gap between the mother who cared for us and the mother we have tried to leave behind as we struggled to get free of her grasp. What we've lost in that process is precisely what we are currently searching for. Healing the mother wound would allow men to feel that their manhood was not inextricably linked to repudiating mother and all she stands for, but rather in reclaiming, as men, a positive connection to the pre-Oedipal mother, the mother who represented to us all those emotions we currently seek: connectedness, interdependence, nurture, and love.

In a distorted way, this is what's at the core of all the pseudo-rituals in the "men's movement." Isn't this what getting in touch with the earth is all about? When workshop leaders encourage men to smear dirt on themselves or take off their shoes and feel the earth under their feet (even when they happen to be in a carpeted meeting room), they hook into a fierce longing for reconnection with the earth and with our mothers who physically embodied our most visceral connection with life and its origins.

Anthropological Androcentrism

The desire to heal men's wounds leads the men's movement to a survey of initiation rituals and rites of passage, as the mechanisms by which traditional cultures established manhood as praxis. But here is one of the chief failings of the movement. Even the most cursory glance at the same myths, archetypes, and anthropological borrowings reveals that all the cultures so celebrated by the men's movement as facilitating deep manhood have been precisely those cultures in which women's status was lowest. As male domination is not a category of thought to the movement, it needn't be a category of history. But its absence creates a major analytic and strategic problem.

Bly and the others wander through anthropological literature like post-

modern tourists, as if the world's cultures were an enormous shopping mall filled with ritual boutiques. After trying them on, they take several home to make an interesting outfit—part Asian, part African, part Native American. Moore and Gillette snatch theories from Native American cosmology, Jungian archetypes, and images from ancient Egypt, 7th century Tibet, Aztecs, Incas, and Sumerians. All are totally decontextualized. But can these rituals be ripped from their larger cultural contexts, or are they not deeply embedded in the cultures of which they are a part, expressing important unstated psychological and metaphysical assumptions about both the males and females of the culture as well as reflecting the social and economic realities of life, including structures of hierarchy and domination?

Bly argues that these men's rituals helped men achieve stable and secure senses of themselves as men, and that these rituals had nothing to do with the hierarchical relations between women and men. In fact, he hints that where men are secure in their gender identity, life is actually better for women. But what we actually learn from non-industrial cultures—as opposed to what we might wish we had learned—is that these initiation ceremonies, rituals, and separate spheres have everything to do with women's inequality. One survey of over 100 non-industrial cultures found that societies with separate men's huts are those in which women have the least power. Those cultures in which men sleep separately from women are those in which women's status is lowest. "Societies with men's huts are those in which women have the least power," writes geographer Daphne Spain.[11] In short, "institutionalized spatial segregation reinforces prevailing male advantages." Anthropologist Thomas Gregor agrees; men's clubs of all kinds are "associated with strongly patriarchal societies."[12]

Gregor's work on the Mehinaku of central Brazil illustrates the selectivity in the men's movement's mythic anthropology. The Mehinaku have well institutionalized men's houses where tribal secrets are kept and ritual instruments played and stored. Spatial segregation is strictly enforced. As one man told Gregor: "This house is only for men. Women may not see anything in here. If a woman comes in, then all the men take her into the woods and she is raped. It has always been that way" (p. 27).

The men's movement is quite selective about which societies and which of their customs they should appropriate. The initiation rituals were ones through which men symbolically appropriated women's power of reproduction and childbirth. Such rituals had a central place in early patriarchal cultures. After all, how could men possibly claim to be all-powerful when it was women who had the ultimate power of bringing life into the world? Men

thus devalued women's power of reproduction and asserted that only men could give birth to men, symbolized in elaborate rebirthing rituals to bring men into the world.

If our goal was not to reassert male power but to ensure gender equality, then the best approach is not to champion the initiation of men into separate mythic spheres:

> When men take care of young children and women control property, boys are apt to grow up with fewer needs to define themselves in opposition to women, and men are less inclined toward antagonistic displays of superiority. When wives are not required to defer to husbands, and men are not encouraged to boast and display fierce hostility, then cultural ideologies are unlikely to portray men as superior and women as inferior.[13]

Interestingly, the interpretations of the myths themselves are asserted to be unambiguous, always leading men away from the home and from women, off into the company of other men. But to take but one example of the dozens of ambiguous readings which might emerge from a confrontation with the original texts, we are reminded that throughout the Odyssey, Odysseus spends his time yearning to be home with his wife and child, looking longingly out at the sea and weeping every night he is away. In Book 11, he returns home, following his prophecy to stop wandering. He takes his oar to a place where men do not salt their food (inland) and where they do not recognize the oar (mistaking it for a thresher), and there he plants the oar in the ground and offers a sacrifice. Then his wanderings will be at an end, and he will be at peace. To us, the quest is, like E.T. said, to go home.

What's more, the evocations of some mythic figures as unambiguous heroes is also problematic. While some mythopoetic leaders advocate the retrieval of Zeus energy, they willfully forget that Zeus was "an incessant rapist, molesting both mortal women and ancient goddesses," whose reign ushered in a terrible era for women, according to Robert Graves—"the hitherto intellectually dominant Greek woman degenerated into the unpaid worker and breeder of children wherever Zeus and Apollo were the ruling gods."[14] Loading up on "Zeus juice" may make compelling myth, but it makes for bad gender politics.

These rituals also have consequences for race relations that their purveyors either ignore or disguise as "respect for traditional cultures." To see a group of middle-class white men appropriating "Indian" rituals, wearing "war paint," drumming and chanting, and taking on totemic animal names is more than silly play, more, even, than "a bunch of boys playing games

with the cultures of people they don't know how to live next door to."[15] It is politically objectionable, similar to the "Tomahawk Chop" of Atlanta Braves baseball fans. But then again, how wise is the storyteller who asserts, as Bly does, that golden hair is a universal sign of beauty? Perhaps, as Braves fans asserted, participants believe that their behavior honors these Native American traditions. In the post-modern, New Age supermarket of the mythopoetic men's movement, though, it feels more like boys playing cowboys and Indians, and letting the Indians win for a change.

There is another, deeper level at which the racism of the new men's movement is even more deeply troubling. Here, we will make a brief historical analogy. During the late 19th century, minstrel shows were enormously popular among white working class men. These shows were particularly popular with young Irish men, and later, in the first decades of the 20th century, among young Jewish men. Performers in "blackface" would imitate black men, singing and dancing in racial sendups. But what did these blackface performers sing about? They sang of their nostalgia, their longing for home, for the comforts of family, especially Mammy. In a sense, as historians understand it now, these young Irish and Jewish performers and audiences projected their own anxieties and longings—the ones that they could not express for fear of feminization—and projected them onto newly freed black migrants to the cities. Blackface was more about the longings of white immigrants than about the real lives of black people.

Of course, today, blackface would be immediately transparent as racist. So men's movement leaders encourage what we might call "redface,"—the appropriation of Native American rituals and symbols—the drum, chants of "ho," warpaint, animal names, etc. And they imagine that these Native cultures expressed a deep spirituality, an abiding love and respect for nature, and a palpable sense of brotherhood. What they are really doing, we believe, is projecting onto these cultures their own longings and their own needs. Such a project relies upon racial, and racist, stereotypes.

Some of the faux-religious iconography of the mythopoetic men's movement gets pretty silly. Moore and Gillette suggest a small crystal pyramid be carried around as "a useful portable icon," and that the soundtrack albums for *Spartacus* or *Ben Hur* provide good background music to access the inner King, since they are "particularly evocative of King energy" (1992, pp. 215 and 217). As Joseph Conwell wrote, in *Manhood's Morning*, a turn of the century advice manual for how to grow up and be a real man, "[r]ot is rot, and it is never more rotten than when it is sandwiched between religious quotations and antiquated poetry."[16]

Historical Hokum

This brief historical analogy of racist tropes in ritual appropriation leads to a larger historical contextualization of the mythopoetic quest. Bly and his followers claim that the current male malaise is the result of the confluence of several factors that has produced the overdominance of women and absence of fathers in a young man's life. The mythic search is initiated in a historically unique situation where routine forms of male bonding have been delegitimated or disappeared. Only men can validate other men's manhood, but the possibilities for this are limited. Thus, they claim, the search for the authentic male represents a step forward, into historically uncharted waters, where men will come face to face with our grief and our pain. On the contrary, we believe that the mythopoetic men's movement is a step backward in two distinct temporal senses—historical and developmental. It augurs a social return to turn of the century masculinist efforts to retrieve manhood and a personal effort to recreate a mythic boyhood. These two temporal retreats, we believe, require a spatial retreat from women's equality, to which we shall turn in the next section.

The concern that modern culture feminizes men, turning the heroic warrior into a desk-bound nerd, is not a very new idea at all. The late 19th century witnessed an equally potent critique of the enervation of modern manhood and the sources of feminization. Then, as now, the causal sequence of this enervation was seen as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which demanded more and more of men's time away from home. This father absence left a void in a young boy's life, which mothers rushed to fill. Thus mothers, and later women in general, as public school and Sunday school teachers, became the validators of manhood. When fathers did return to the home in the evening, they found an utterly feminized domestic sphere, against which they chafed as they squirmed to find some deep bonding with other men.

Such diagnoses echoed across the country in a variety of settings. Here's the dashing Basil Ransome's indictment of the age in Henry James's *The Bostonians*, a sentiment that could have been written by Robert Bly today:

> The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not

> fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is . . . that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt![17]

From pulpits to editorial pages, from gymnasiums to classrooms, men appeared concerned about the feminization of American culture and sought remedies that would cure men of their culturally induced enervation.

Structurally, the traditional definitions of masculinity were rapidly eroding at the turn of the century. The closing of the frontier meant that no longer would men have that literal-geographic space to test their mettle against nature and other men. The rapid industrialization of American manufacturing meant that individual men were no longer the owners or proprietors of their own labor. As noted earlier, at the time of the Civil War, 90% of men in the United States were independent farmers or self-employed businessmen or artisans. By 1870, that number had dropped to two of three, and by 1910, less than one-third of U.S. men were economically autonomous. At the same time, the northward migration of newly freed slaves, the dramatic immigration of swarthy Southern Europeans, and the emergence of visible homosexual enclaves in major cities all signalled new competitors for white, middle class men's power in the public domain. What's more, women were demanding equality in the public sphere in unprecedented ways. Not only in the ballot box or the classroom, but women were demanding equality in the workplace and in the bedroom, as social "feminists" argued for the right to birth control and "sex rights."

Suddenly men felt themselves to be on the defensive, and launched a multi-faceted critique of turn of the century culture. A health and fitness craze swept over the country, as more and more men sought the tonic freshness of the outdoors to offset the daily routine of "brain work." Bernarr Macfadden and other promoters of "physical culture" rode a wave of interest that saw dramatic increases in sports such as boxing, football, and weightlifting as methods to develop real manhood.

Child rearing manuals promoted a dichotomous separation of little boys and little girls. Parents were instructed to dress boys and girls differently from birth, and to follow that separation through to youth, where boys were to be encouraged to do certain activities (sports, rough play) and prevented from doing others (reading, sleeping on feather beds, going to parties) for fear of possible contamination by feminizing influences. Separate child rearing continued into the schoolroom. Coeducation was feared because women

would sap the virility of male students. By adolescence, "boy culture" was to be organized and disciplined under male supervision, but strict separation of the sexes was to be maintained to insure that boys would grow up to be real men. The reorganization of the Young Men's Christian Association in the 1880s, and the organization of the Boy's Brigades and Knights of King Arthur in the 1880s, and 90s, indicated an effort to provide young boys with adult male role models, simultaneously disciplining and controlling boy culture and demarcating male space from female space in a highly ritualized and mythopoetic setting. The founding of Boy Scouts of America in 1910 by Ernest Thompson Seton provides a graphic indictment of contemporary manhood. Women, he argued, were turning "robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood into a lot of flat chested cigarette smokers with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality."[18]

Cultural feminization was challenged by religious leaders, who sought to reinvest the cultural images of Jesus with virile manhood. The Muscular Christianity movement sought to transform religious iconography, which often portrayed Jesus as soft and gentle. Jesus was "no dough-faced, little spittle proposition," proclaimed evangelist Billy Sunday, but "the greatest scrapper who ever lived." "Lord save us from off-handed, flabby cheeked, brittle boned, weak-kneed, thin-skinned, pliable, plastic, spineless, effeminate, ossified, three carat Christianity" Sunday pleaded.[19]

And adult men had their fraternal lodges to retreat to. Fraternal orders were enormously popular at the turn of the century; slightly less than one of four American men belonged to an order.[20] The lodge was a homosocial preserve, celebrating a purified, nurturant masculinity. James Laird of the Nebraska Grand Lodge endorsed a Masonic war against "destructive effeminacy" in 1876. "What Masons want, what the world wants, is not sympathy, not cooperation, not reform, not redemption, but strength."[21]

These fraternal orders are the turn of the century precursor to contemporary mythopoetic retreats. Here, men's initiation rituals took on a systematic, routinized character: with up to fifty different levels of status, one could be reasonably certain that an initiation was going to take place at each meeting. Such rituals followed a similar appropriation of tradition. The profane man, the man born of woman, is symbolically killed, and reborn into the band of equal brothers, imitating what these men knew of initiation in non-western cultures. (Like baptismal priests, the fraternal elders often wore long robes and aprons—literally appropriating women's dresses as they symbolically appropriated women's reproductive power.)

There is one interesting difference in the images of these turn-of-the-

century men from their 1990's progeny. The earlier movement reflected the 19th century fascination with the classical era—mythical views of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome provided the icons. Bly and the mythopoetic men's movement fall very much within the New Age iconography: the classical past is no longer in vogue. Rather there is a retreat to an even-more distant mythical past, that of repackaged images of native societies.

The masculinist efforts to retrieve authentic manly adventure resonated in American literature as well. Following that Freudian axiom that the objects that give meaning to life that we lose in reality we recreate in fantasy, writers sought to recreate what we had already lost. The first "western," Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903), and Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan series returned men to the frontier and the jungle, even as they receded from men's grasp. Wrenched from effete civilized life, Tarzan and Buck hear the call of their primitive instincts and return to become, respectively, apes and wolves. Mythic heroes who stood for untamed manhood, capable of beating back rapid industrialization and feminization, abounded in artisanal heroes like Paul Bunyon (collected 1914–1916), John Henry (ca. 1873), and Casey Jones (1900).

Most troubling of all these masculinist efforts to revive a recharged manhood is the turn of the century cult of the warrior, embedded within the new militarism that contributed to the Spanish American War in 1898. The soldier was seen as a moral exemplar, none more than Theodore Roosevelt, whose triumph over youthful frailty and illness and subsequent robust aggression served as a template for a revitalized social character. Roosevelt fused compulsive masculinity (the strenuous life) with military adventurism (imperialist intervention) into a powerful synthesis. Evocations of the warrior in the era of Operation Desert Storm clearly made Robert Bly uneasy; he attempted, unsuccessfully, to organize a group of writers against the war in the Gulf, just as he earlier had worked to organize writers against the Vietnam war. But many of his followers uncritically embrace warrior images, without any trace of discomfort.

The weekend warriors join a host of contemporary masculinists who search for the masculine primitive among the shards of advanced industrial culture.[22] One Yale senior waxed nostalgic about his years as a member of Skull and Bones:

> I mean, it's a damn shame it's got to end. The fraternity and everything. Someday we should build us all a fraternity house that wouldn't end. And we could initiate all our friends and go off and drink like freshmen and never graduate.

> Hell! Why build a fraternity house? Let's build one gigantic fraternity system!—Graduating senior, age twenty-one.

How different are they from the wealthy members of the Bohemian Club in San Francisco who go off to Bohemian Grove retreats every summer—retreats that are drenched with ritualized male bonding, dancing partially naked in front of campfires, "full of schmaltz and nostalgia"—with corporate CEOs and legislators (and presidents), and other members of the American ruling class,[23] or take part in the occasional Wild Man retreat if he felt the creeping enervation of having to deal with adult women on an equal basis. But in case the impact on women is lost to our dreaming Yalie, let him hear the voice of one of his brothers, another member of Yale's Skull and Bones club. "I would predict an increase in date rape," he prophesied, should the club be forced to admit women.[24]

Boys' Town

The image of the eternal fraternity reveals a partially hidden longing that lies just beneath the surface of Bly's appeal. The search for the deep masculine is actually a search for lost boyhood, that homosocial innocence of preadolescence, at once rough and tumble and sweetly naive. It is an effort to turn back the clock to that time before work and family responsibilities yanked men away from their buddies, from a world of fun. Leslie Fiedler noticed this nostalgic yearning for lost boyhood, a world of homosocial intimacy as the dominant theme in American literature. Unlike European literature, in which the action revolved around adult men and women in domestic entanglements, the American novel allows the young man to escape domesticity by being kidnapped, running away, enlisting in the army, or being shipwrecked. The American romantic couple is Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck Finn and Jim, the Lone Ranger and Tonto. These couples "proffer a chaste male love as the ultimate emotional experience" revealing an "implacable nostalgia for the infantile, at once wrong headed and somehow admirable," he writes. The authors' "self congratulatory buddy-buddiness" also reveals an "astonishing naivete."[25] "I reckon I gotta light out for the territory," says Huck, "cuz Aunt Sally, she's gonna civilise me, and I can't stand it."

The mythopoetic men's retreats recall the clubhouse with the sign reading "No Girls Allowed" or the movie *Stand By Me* that captures that last summer before junior high school, before having to posture to impress girls will for-

ever distort the relationships among the boys. What Kenneth Keniston calls the "fallacy of romantic regression" appeals not to men who want to be men, but rather men who want to re-become boys; thus their antipathy towards women and work is so easily displaced onto mothers who have not been part of their lives for decades. "No one is going to catch me lady and make me a man. I want always to be a little boy and to have fun." So said Peter Pan. So say the men at wildman retreats.

This search for lost boyhood as the search for the authentic masculine helps explain several of the paradoxes that emerge at the men's retreats. The men's movement speaks to men not as fathers but as sons searching for their fathers. But curiously, the attendees at the workshops are middle-aged men, many of whom are, themselves, fathers. They rarely speak of their own children (and when they do, it's almost exclusively their sons; it's as if daughters do not exist in this world). They speak as sons, of their pain as sons estranged from fathers. That is, they would rather complain about something they can barely change than work towards transforming something that they can: their relationships with their own children and the structured inequalities of power between men and women, adults and children, and one man and another.

However, at the retreats, they are also asked to honor the elders, the older men at the weekend retreats, who are seen to embody a certain deeply male wisdom. Leaders invite us to admire the wisdom of older men, to listen to their stories, learn from the wisdom they have gained through the years. But wait, are these not the same elder men (fathers) who abandoned us? Thus when Bly or his followers speak as fathers, they criticize contemporary men as having followed mother, having been dutiful little boys (having been feminized). But when they speak as sons, they are angry and hurt by fathers who behaved exactly as they have.

How do we explain this shift in focus? "I'm not sure why they want to be back in the good old days," observed a woman therapist in 1967. "Do they want to be back there as the father, or do they want to be back there as the child?"[26] When we speak as sons, we are angry and wounded by our fathers. When we speak as fathers, we expect veneration and admiration from sons. We are thus going to have it both ways, particularly, whichever way allows us to feel like the innocent victim of other people's disempowering behavior, the victim of what others (fathers or sons) have done to us. This is again the lost (false) innocence of mythic boyhood.

But it is also more than that—it is staking a claim for victimhood and entitlement at the same time. This is what explains the emphasis on the role

of the little prince in the Iron John story, and explains the way that these men, feeling like boys, want to claim their inner King. The prince is actually not the central figure in Iron John's story; it is Iron John himself, who is liberated by the young boy's quest. As the title indicates, he is the star. But male readers see themselves as the king's son, the prince, and not as Iron John.

But who is the prince? The prince is the rightful heir to power; he will be the King. He is literally *entitled* to power, but he is not yet ready for it. So too, for manhood. Men's movement participants believe themselves entitled to that power, the power that comes from being a man, the power we might call patriarchy, or male privilege. They do not feel that power yet—but they want to, and they feel themselves entitled to it. This is why the men at the mythopoetic retreats find it so much easier to imagine themselves as sons, to call themselves "adult children"—as if the word "adult" was an adjective, modifying the word "child"—rather than as fully adult, responsible to others, and refusing to claim their privileged inheritance.[27]

Whispers of the Heart

We believe that the mythopoetic quest is misguided, because it reproduces masculinity as a power relation—the power of men over women and the power of some men over other men. But there is no reason to doubt Bly or his followers' sincerity, or their desire to recreate a world of gender certainty. The appeal of this message is in response to feminism, but not only in the negative sense we have been describing. It is also an indication that millions of men have been forced to grapple with what it means to be a man. Men are searching, looking for a new sense of meaning. That they've been looking under every possible stone and crystal is no surprise, nor is it a surprise that the most popular solution so far is one that offers a quick and comfortable fix. While the mythopoetic solution may not bring real change, the enthusiasm with which he has been greeted represents, at least in part, part of a process of change.

A key aspect of that process, a progressive whisper within a reactive structure, is that mythopoetic groups and gatherings can be means for men to break their isolation from other men. Part of patriarchy's interpersonal cement is an isolation that keeps each man fearful of his own masculinity and forces him to go to lengths to prove to the other guys that he's a real man. By breaking the isolation, by setting up opportunities for men to express a range of feelings among themselves and to talk about their fears and loves

and challenges, men can take steps towards disassociating manhood and domination and reestablishing it on the basis of connection and harmony with those around us.[28]

This activity of redefinition is seen in the nostalgia for boyhood. We've talked about the regressive side of this nostalgia, but we also must ask why this nostalgia is so powerful. Perhaps it is part of what Barbara Ehrenreich described as men's flight from commitment symbolized by the magazine that extolled a male inhabiting an adult body but acting like a boy at play, literally a Play-boy.[29] But there's more: It is a longing for what men have given up in order to fit into the tight pants of masculinity. Becoming a man required a suppression of a range of human capacities, capabilities, and emotions. But these capacities maintain a nagging presence in our own lives. Few of us completely or effortlessly fit into the dictates of male gender power, particularly in a society where women have demanded equality and have challenged men to examine our own lives. As we attempt to expand our emotional repertoire, as we learn to reach out to our brothers, sisters, and children, it reawakens a childhood voice that has long been buried. Playing in the woods recalls the days when we were less preoccupied with maintaining our gender barriers, when we felt more at home with the bodies and the tears of other males, and when we felt more at home with ourselves. It isn't that any moment of our lives we were completely free of the rigors of gender acquisition, but rather that gender demands did not yet so completely overwhelm a range of other human characteristics and possibilities. Of course, part of the yearning for the past is a nostalgia for a past that did not completely exist.[30]

The alternative is not to reject personal change and personal growth. It is not for men to start a political movement in the image of other political movements: Alright men, let's get out there and get this job done no matter what the cost. It is to hear what women have been telling us for the past two and one-half decades—that personal change is an indispensable element of, and tool for, social change, and that structural social change is an indispensable element for personal change.

It is a personal vision of political change and a political vision of personal change that we propose as an alternative to the men's movement that will allow men's wild and progressive impulses to blossom.

The Flight from Feminism

What keeps Bly and his followers from taking this radical course of personal and social change are his protests that his work has nothing to do with

women or feminism. Bly writes that his book "does not constitute a challenge to the women's movement" that he "does not seek to turn men against women, nor to return men to their domineering mode that has led to repression of women and their values for centuries" (1990, p. x). But such claims are disingenuous.

Though Bly is careful to hedge his comments, the book is full of inferences that reveal how he embraces traditional gender roles:

> A mother's job is, after all, to civilize the boy. (P. 11)

or

> A man who cannot defend his own space cannot defend women and children. (P. 156)

or:

> As more and more mothers work out of the house, and cannot show their daughters what they produce, similar emotions may develop in the daughter's psyche, with a consequent suspicion of grown women. (P. 96)

Alone with other men, Bly gives this anti-feminist tendency fuller play. Journalists Steve Chapple and David Talbot describe an encounter between Bly and his campers at a retreat: "Robert, when we tell women our desires, they tell us we're wrong," shouts out one camper. "So," says Bly, "then you bust them in the mouth because no one has the right to tell another person what their true desires are."[31]

And if Bly sidesteps the issue, his followers do not. One leader of retreats to heal the father wound argues:

> A lot of men feel hung out to dry by the women's movement. A lot of men feel that they, personally, are being held responsible for everything that's macho and wrong in the world today: rape, wife-beating, war. They've been feeling very bad about themselves, and so they're overjoyed to recover their maleness and feel proud about themselves as men. (cited in Chapple and Talbot, 195)

Ray Raphael celebrates men's ability to do anything women can:

> At a time when an enlightened feminism has taken away many of our traditional props, at a time when many of our manly roles have become virtually obsolete, at a time when we have been placed on the defensive in what we perceive as a never-ending competition between the sexes, we have countered by aggressively usurping the roles once played by women.[32]

And journalist Trip Gabriel reports from the gender front that "more than the men's movement cares to admit, it is a reaction to the decades of feminism, a reclaiming of prerogatives that men have long been made to feel defensive about."[33]

Note how each of these men couches the reaction against feminism in terms of men's defensiveness. Men have been made to feel badly about traditional masculinity, about men's violence, rape, pornography, battery and a litany of other feminist accusations. Their response is not to enlist in the feminist struggle against these excesses of manly behavior but to declare themselves tired of listening.

The retreat to find a revitalized and recharged manhood, embodied in the new men's movement, is most definitely a retreat. It is a retreat from the mother, who embodies, in the practices of mothering, precisely the positive qualities of caring and nurturing that men are running away from her to find. It is a retreat from the historical specificity of the present era, a retreat from political responsibilities to confront male excesses that daily manifest themselves on our streets, in our schools, in our workplaces, in our bedrooms, excesses such as rape, violence, spouse abuse, gay bashing, high risk sexual behavior, drunk driving. It is a retreat to a highly selective anthropological world of rituals that reproduce men's cultural power over women and that are now used to facilitate a deeper nostalgic retreat to the lost world of innocent boyhood. It is thus a retreat from women, from adult men's responsibilities to embrace women's equality and struggle against those obstacles that continue to lie in the path of gender equality. Male bonding, hailed as the positive outcome of these weekend retreats, is double sided. Bonding implies connection with others, and also implies constraints, responsibilities. The deep masculine will never be retrieved by running away from women. Only by fighting for equality, side by side, as equals, can we realize the best of what it means to be a man.

NOTES

1. William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Anchor, 1956), 356.
2. Robert Bly, *Iron John* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990).
3. Robert Bly, "What Men Really Want," in *New Age Journal* (May 1982): 31–51.
4. Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette, *The King Within: Accessing the King in the Male Psyche* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), 49; Bly, *Iron John*, p. 230.
5. George Gilder, *Naked Nomads* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974).

6. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 73.

7. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1144.

8. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

9. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Gayle Rubin; and Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Lillian Rubin, *Intimate Strangers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

10. R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

11. Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 76.

12. Thomas Gregor, "No Girls Allowed," *Science* 82 (December 1982): 27.

13. Scott Coltrane, *Family Man* (unpublished ms.), p. 41.

14. Cited in Jane Caputi and Gurdene O. Mackenzie, "Pumping *Iron John*," in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 72. See also Harry Brod, "Reply to Bly," *AHP Perspective* (April 1985).

15. Hattie Gossett, "min's movement??? a page drama," in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement*, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 21.

16. Joseph Alfred Conwell, *Manhood's Morning; or, "Go it while You're Young": A Book for Young Men Between 14 and 28 Years of Age* (Wineland, N.J.: The Hominis Book Company, 1896), 155.

17. Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1885; reprint, New York: Signet, 1966), 293. The material in this section is drawn primarily from Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, in press).

18. Cited in David Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 49.

19. Cited in William McLaughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 175, 179.

20. W. S. Harwood, "Secret Societies in America," *The North American Review* 164 (May 1897): 620–23.

21. Cited in Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 141.

22. Masculinists, as distinct from either pro-feminist men or self-conscious anti-feminists, are more concerned with what they see as the feminization of men than the feminism of women. In response to this fear of feminization, they attempt to carve out homosocial environments in both the public and private spheres in order to celebrate male bonding and fantasies of escape from women. See Michael Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," *Gender & Society*

1 (1987). Yale student cited in William F. Buckley, "The Clubhouse" in *About Men*, ed. D. Erickson (New York: Poseiden Press, 1987), 257.

23. See, for example, G. William Domhoff, *The Bohemian Grove and Other Ruling Class Retreats* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

24. Cited in *Newsweek*, 23 September 1991.

25. Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), 144.

26. Cited in Myron Brenton, *The American Male* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 107.

27. It's also been suggested that movement participants are princes because there can only be one King, Bly himself, the symbolic "good" father who facilitates, through traditional analytic transference, the healing of the father wound. But we believe that the mythopoetic men's movement is more than Freudian psychoanalysis on a mass scale; it is also political and ideological.

28. An alternative approach to breaking this isolation but within a profeminist perspective, is addressed in Kaufman's *Cracking the Armour: Power, Pain, and the Lives of Men* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 1993).

29. Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men* (New York: Anchor, 1983).

30. Our thanks to Harry Brod for suggesting this final point, the sense of nostalgia for something that did not fully exist.

31. Cited in Steve Chapple and David Talbot, *Burning Desires* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 196.

32. Ray Raphael, *The Men From the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 172.

33. Trip Gabriel, "In Touch with the Tool Belt Chromosome," *The New York Times*, 22 September 1991, 31.

Mythopoetic Foundations and New Age Patriarchy

KEN CLATTERBAUGH

As soon as war is declared it will be impossible to hold the poets back. Rhyme is still the most effective drum.

Jean Giraudoux, *Duel of Angels*, Act I

THE DEBATE

The poet Robert Bly has fired a salvo in what has been called "the longest war."[1] Some think he may even have started a small war of his own with the publication of *Iron John* and the innumerable men's gatherings he has hosted. Bly's ideas are almost universally rejected by feminist women and their male allies as patriarchal or at least as patriarchy friendly.[2] Bly himself acknowledges this hostility but seems to believe that he is contributing to rather than detracting from the long-term goals of the women's movement. "I want to make clear that this book [*Iron John*] does not seek . . . to return men to the domineering mode that has led to repression of women . . ." (Bly 1990, x).[3] He envisions a future when men and women will meet as true spiritual equals and he seems to welcome changing roles (Bly 1990, 60–61; Bly 1982, 51). How can such a vision be patriarchal or anti-feminist? Why do feminist critics find the mythopoetic movement problematic? This controversy has made Bly increasingly distrustful of how his message is being received and escalated the war of words between mythopoetic men and feminist critics.[4]

Feminist women are not uninformed about the several men's movements. Feminist women welcome the pro-feminist men's movement of the early 1970s. Books such as Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man*[5] and Marc Feigen Fasteau's *The Male Machine*[6] featured endorsements by prominent feminists

such as Wilma Scott Heide, president of the National Organization for Women, 1971–1974, and Gloria Steinem. Men's work was the other side of the coin. If women were to achieve a new set of choices, men would both lose privilege and gain choices for themselves. But only men could decide for themselves to go in a direction compatible with contemporary feminism. Thus, Gloria Steinem wrote in the introduction to *The Male Machine:* "This book is a complement to the feminist revolution, yet it is one no woman could write. It is the revolution's other half" (p. xv). Yet, Steinem's introduction to *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* typifies many feminists' view of the mythopoetic movement. While she openly respects male "allies in a shared struggle toward a new future," she denounces "the atavistic masculine" values proposed by Robert Bly in *Iron John* (Hagan 1992, viii).

Much is at stake in this debate. If feminist critics are right, then the mythopoetic movement threatens the revolution begun in the 1960s. Men pulled into the movement will find themselves embracing the values, attitudes, and behaviors that create and maintain the traditional roles that feminism seeks to remove. Such a regression not only harms the cause of feminism, but also puts men at risk, since they would lose the gains of a more equal society. On the other hand, if Bly is right, the mythopoetic movement is a means to the future equality sought by feminists. Men who reach down and find the deep masculine, will be better able to reject the immature men who become patriarchs. Of course, both could be wrong. But both cannot be right.

In this essay I argue that, independently of Bly's hopes or intentions, the mythopoetic men's movement is unlikely to go in any direction other than toward some version of patriarchy. The reasons for this misdirection lie in the very foundations of mythopoetic thought. And, these foundational beliefs can be easily gleaned from basic writings, such as *Iron John* and its progenitors, and Moore and Gillette's *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover.*[7] (Of course, one needs to supplement these sources with tapes, remarks at gatherings, interviews, and other incidental pieces.) Thus, my first conclusion is that the mythopoetic movement is indeed an obstacle to an egalitarian future. But my second conclusion is that the mythopoetic movement may not be a very serious obstacle. I am inclined to reject both Bly's claims of the compatibility of feminist goals with mythopoetic tendencies and feminist concerns that the mythopoetic movement may greatly extend the life of patriarchal society.

Patriarchal structures are not quite invisible, but they can be hard to discern. The point of men's and women's consciousness raising sessions in the 1970s was to detect such insidious structures and find ways to dissolve them.

Structures might be personal such as a woman being left out of a conversation in the classroom, or facts like the near absence of women in the U.S. congress and other places of political and corporate power. Part of the reason for the near invisibility of these structures is that they have been in place for so long that we are acculturated to see them as natural or inevitable. Institutionalized male power is just the way things are.

Many of these structures have deep roots in how we think about women and men, what attributes we give them, what science has concluded about male nature and female nature, and what religions tell us about the male and female. A few years ago a major university faced severe budget cuts; they believed they had to eliminate or reduce certain programs. Their selection of programs focused almost exclusively on those that had traditionally provided career opportunities for women, such as nutrition, textiles, dental hygiene, and nursing. They valued these programs less than engineering, physics, or mathematics. When it was pointed out that they were devaluing what was traditionally of value to women, they were surprised. Their answer was that they had valued certain areas more than others and not thought about the impact on women (even though closures dramatically dropped the percentage of women faculty). Patriarchy requires valuing what is traditionally male and devaluing what is traditionally female. Such deep roots make patriarchy hard to eradicate.

Devaluing what women do typically accompanies denying women access to what is traditionally male. Alleged essential differences between men and women often are the underpinnings of both devaluation and denial of access. Men are by "nature" active, creative, leaders, suited for certain arenas, while women are essentially passive, nurturing, followers of the male lead, and best suited for other arenas. Messages that reflect these underpinnings are common in the various instruments of ideology, namely, literature, film, and advertising. Thus, feminism must combat not only the messages of patriarchy but also the vehicles that convey these messages.

The accumulated denial of access for women shows itself clearly in the "men's clubs": Congress, the Supreme Court, the Federal Reserve, executive offices, colleges and universities, corporate boards, and spiritual institutions. These are where collective male power is institutionalized. To hold power is crudely to be able to make someone act, think, or feel in ways that person would not act, think, or feel if the power holder did not act. A market created by advertising is an act of power, as is passing a law or making a spiritual pronouncement. Another aspect of patriarchy is that being male in clearly recognized ways is a norm against which others are compared; men

are centered in patriarchal discourse.[8] Being competent means being assertive, articulate, and efficient in a style that has evolved and is perceived as masculine. Women were and are excluded from certain athletic events, medicine, law, political office, and the military precisely because no one could imagine them living up to even minimal patriarchal definitions of ability. The fact that there is change today, a nibbling at the edges of patriarchy, does not mean that patriarchal society has been abandoned. Insidious and deeply layered power and definition remain characteristics of contemporary patriarchy.

My reasons for making these obvious points is that they make it clear how someone could overlook patriarchal ideas. What is hidden and deep-rooted may easily reappear in a new form, if patriarchal foundations are not noticed. Deep-rooted structures such as racism have continually taken new guises in the United States over the past 225 years. Sometimes these guises are intentionally cultivated; often they are not. Even liberal feminism with its inclusive message often accepts a patriarchal norm by arguing that women can be just as tough, competitive, efficient, and, if necessary, ruthless as men in holding power. Thus, the process of eradicating patriarchy is continuous and never easy. It is a series of mistakes from which we can hopefully discern the right direction.

I think something like this regenerated patriarchy is what has happened with the mythopoetic men's movement. Bly has knocked down the foliage of the old age version of patriarchy, dug up some roots, replanted them, and is harvesting a "new age patriarchy" for his efforts. I do not seek to pass judgment on Robert Bly, himself. There is plenty of evidence that he does not intend to recreate patriarchal themes or institutions. There is also evidence that he should have been more vigilant in his gatherings and writings. In any case, I argue that his foundational ideas are at their core patriarchal. But even well-intentioned failures can be highly instructive.

THE PATRIARCHAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MYTHOPOETIC MOVEMENT

The Vehicle: The Grimm Fairy Tale of Iron Hans

The mythopoetic movement is fond of telling stories. The purpose of looking at stories, especially legends, mythology, and folk tales is to uncover repeated behavior patterns that count as archetypal or universal. These pat-

terns are the "crystalline underpinning to the soul water" (Bly 1990, 229–30). Stories reveal the collective unconscious and the collective unconscious houses the scripts which must be understood (Bly 1990, 55).

There are a great many stories in all cultures at different historical moments, and Bly frequently alludes to African, Celtic, and Native American stories.[9] But his preferred vehicle is the Grimms' fairy tale "Iron Hans," which Bly tells as the story of Iron John. Bly says very little about the story except that it may be ten or twenty thousand years old (Bly 1990, 5 cf. Pelka). Older tales in the folk tradition are particularly important for picking up the primordial images which are housed in the unconscious.

Yet, even a most cursory look at the folklorist writings reveals that it is extremely doubtful that these tales can credibly be claimed as folk tales in an oral tradition. They are literary devices intended to convey rigid gender roles. Thus, John M. Ellis writes:

> The changes introduced by the Grimms were far more than mere stylistic matters, and the facts of their editorial procedures, taken together with the evidence as to their sources, are sufficient completely to undermine any notion that the Grimms' fairy tales are of folk, or peasant, or even German origin. And the facts also show the Grimms' attempts to foster these illusions.[10]

Even more significant are the blatantly sexist messages of the Grimms' tales. In *Grimm's Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, a title that neatly captures the gender messages of these tales, Ruth Bottigheimer notes two dominant patriarchal themes in these stories, namely, boys are active while girls are passive and girls need to be punished more severely for transgressions than boys.[11] The first theme is identified by almost every folklorist who has worked with the Grimm brothers' collection:

> [The] heroine [is] a pure virgin who becomes the well deserved prize for a courageous hero who had overcome the . . . enemy by a vigorous and determined fight. She was his reward. . . .[12]

> The male hero is the adventurer, the doer, and the rescuer, whereas the female protagonist is generally passive if not comatose. Moreover the Grimm . . . tales often conserve a medieval notion of "might makes right" along with typical "bourgeois myths" of industriousness, cleanliness, and truthfulness as holiness.[13]

Bottigheimer's second theme is clearly illustrated by comparing the two Grimm brothers' stories "Our Lady's Child" and "Iron Hans." In "Iron Hans" the boy breaks a minor rule and acquires a gold finger, but he is still

allowed to travel the world and find fame and fortune. Marienkind in "Our Lady's Child" also breaks a minor rule and acquires a gold finger; her punishment is to sit alone, living off roots and berries while her clothes rot and fall off in a freezing rain (Bottigheimer, 91).

The patriarchal themes of the Grimm brothers' folk tale may have appealed to Prussian conservatives and Nazi conservatives; in fact the Allies banned the Grimms' tales for a brief time in 1945 out of fear of their fascist message. And, these stories, except for the magic they portray, also fit the images sought by the Christian right—masculine dominant and female submissive. One can hardly expect feminist critics, who must be concerned with the vehicles used to present gender roles, to rejoice in such "neatly fulfilling patriarchal roles and expectations" as those depicted in *Iron John*.[14]

ESSENTIALISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Essentialism is the view that social differences such as those between men and women, people of different races, or social classes are due to intrinsic biological or psychic differences between the members of the different groups. Strong essentialism believes that social differences can be more fully explained by these innate differences than by social learning or the influence of social institutions. A consequence of essentialism is that given that people have these real inner differences, they will not be happy if they deny the expression of these differences. Thus, in the conservative thinking of George Gilder, men will never be fulfilled by staying at home taking care of the children and women will similarly be frustrated if they try to go against their nature and do what is traditionally masculine.[15] Essentialism plays a central role in historical patriarchal ideology. Bad things are bound to happen if change is introduced that goes against essential natures. Women are women and men are men and what men and women traditionally have done reflects their real natures—unhappiness, and possible social chaos, is the price of trying to alter gender roles.

Essentialism has enjoyed a revival in recent years with the development of sociobiology, which argues that because certain behaviors and attitudes have been useful as mechanisms for the perpetuation of genetic material, they have been encoded in our genes. We are, therefore, left with a set of male behavior patterns and female behavior patterns that are hard wired, built into us as genetic predispositions. Many who embrace this sociobiological theory do not see any point in trying to dramatically change male and female

behaviors for the simple reason that either it will not work or the costs to society and individuals will be too high if we try to go against nature.[16]

The mythopoetic movement is as deeply essentialist as the classical or even religious conservative. Moore and Gillette in their foundational work, *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*, are unashamedly essentialist. "It is our experience that deep within every man are blueprints, what we can also call 'hard wiring,' for the calm and positive mature masculine. Jungians refer to these masculine potentials as archetypes, or 'primordial images' " (p. 9). Bly is more metaphorical. He notes that although only 3 percent of the DNA in men and women is different, it exists in every cell in the body (Bly 1990, 234). Elsewhere, he seems to opt directly for the sociobiological alternative: "The ancient practice of initiation then—still very much alive in our genetic structure . . ." (Bly 1990, 36).

Bly's wild man is that essential male energy which men must tap in order to be fulfilled (Bly 1990, 55). Men today are unhappy because they have lost touch with and been denied this essential maleness. These men are feminized, in touch with the feminine but out of touch with the deep masculine (cf. Moore and Gillette, p. xviii). Bly believes that there was a better time when men were more in touch with their masculine side. But like many conservatives, Bly believes that "the United States has undergone an unmistakable decline since 1950 . . ." (Bly 1990, 35; also Bly 1982, 32).

In addition to unhappiness, a further consequence of Bly's essentialism is that no woman can ever initiate a boy into manhood (Bly 1982, 36; Bly 1990, 99). This consequence makes Bly very critical of single mothers; like his conservative counterparts, he finds women-headed families the major source of social disintegration (Bly 1985; Bly 1990, 17, 32).

Essentialism also plays a critical causal role in the mythopoetic concept of *shame*. A man is ashamed when his essential maleness is put down or denied to him (Bly 1990, 147, 18–19; cf. Bly and Tannen 1992, 92; Moore and Gillette, p. xviii). Men have been shamed into losing touch with the masculine side, thus becoming soft, feminine, and passive (Bly 1990, 2–5). Ending the shame and getting in touch with the wild man are very much the same accomplishment, and for Bly the solution is to steal the key from under the *mother's* pillow (Bly 1990, 10–11, 32–33). Shame and essentialism contribute to Bly's fondness for blaming mothers—it is the mother's role to raise the child, so a boy grows up with a feminine (inappropriate) view of his maleness. Women cannot help, given their natures, but shame the son (Bly 1990, 24–25). Women misinform sons about their fathers and themselves: "You're not going to get a straight picture of your father out of your mother. Instead, all

the inadequacies of the father are well pointed out" (Bly 1982, 51). A wise woman turns the son over to other men. Similarly, feminist women cannot help but shame men because they too speak from their essentially female side; they cannot know the masculine and how it is needed by men (Bly 1982, 37; Bly 1990, 63).

These ancient patriarchal themes suggest that men have been misinformed by the women who raised them and that men can learn the truth only by going to other men (Moore and Gillette, p. xviii). Thus, the essentialism promotes a kind of separatism and distrust, a separatism that suggests that only men can heal men, that men are deeply wounded by women, that men need to be alone together in order to get it straight. Unlike contemporary psychology in which a person can be both masculine and feminine, mythopoetics see the masculine and feminine as opposite, "defenders" and "attackers" (Bly 1990, 174–75). In this essentialism, men have little or nothing to gain from women's teachings (feminism) and even need to defend themselves from female disinformation.

Both Bly's vehicle and mythopoetic essentialism are deep roots of patriarchy. Put them together and we have a story of an adventurous boy who comes to greatness by overcoming his mother's misinformation about himself and winning a princess for his prize. This is hardly the stuff of feminist dreams for a new and gender-equal future.

INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL AMBIGUITIES

Mythopoetic essentialism and its favored vehicles push the movement in an overtly patriarchal direction. But there is another root of patriarchy in this movement which allows it to covertly slide in a patriarchal direction. The neo-Jungian underpinnings of the mythopoetic movement leave behind a vacuous and morally sterile vision of masculinity. This vacuity and sterility together with its essentialist categories encourages a kind of patriarchal drift. Simply stated, unless patriarchal paths are firmly blocked within the foundations of a belief system operating in a patriarchy, patriarchal paths will remain open and attractive to believers. The mythopoetic movement does not challenge patriarchal beliefs and values; if anything it serves its members as a refuge from feminist critique.

How does this vacuity and permissiveness arise? The foundational concept within the neo-Jungian mythopoetic movement is that of an archetype. Bly himself prefers to talk of such things metaphorically. Thus, he refers to

"old familiar energies, the seven figures or beings of luminous powers" (Bly 1990, 229–30). Or Bly talks about the "crystalline underpinning to the soul water" (Bly 1990, 229–30). Moore and Gillette, as we have noted, are more explicit in talking about archetypes or primordial images hard wired into the psyche. Pascal, in *Jung to Live By*, offers a capsule definition of archetype: "psychological realities of a biological, psycho-biological or image producing character that are typical, stereotypical, and universal."[17] Examples of archetypes include suckling in infants, frowning, crying, mating games, and repeated behaviors of any kind. Clearly, the concept is used ambiguously, as it was in Jung, to include behaviors, some of which are instinctual and some of which are learned. The ambiguity causes confusion about what men are since what is learned can often be unlearned; what is instinctual or biological must often simply be lived with. Bly's message is a dual one; it promises both change and permanence without offering any way to tell which is which.

The male psyche in the neo-Jungian description becomes a rather crowded city divided into four quadrants, represented by the archetypes of king, warrior, magician, and lover. These archetypes have a mature and an immature form (Moore and Gillette, p. 52). The trickster, a frequent visitor to the pages of the mythopoetic literature, is an immature archetype of the magician. Moore and Gillette identify the trickster as: "that immature masculine energy that plays tricks, of a more or less serious nature, in one's own life and on others. He is expert at creating appearances, and then "selling" us on those appearances. He seduces people into believing him, and then he pulls the rug out from under them" (Moore and Gillette, p. 28). Bly makes a very similar pronouncement in *Iron John* (Bly 1990, 228). In sum, the trickster is that part of us that plays tricks, the king is that part of us that acts kingly, the warrior is that part of us that makes us defend ourselves, the lover is that part of us that makes us sensuous.

The game that is being played out in these uninformative explications of the main archetypes is very old and very tired. Gould, in *The Mismeasure of Man*, calls it "reification."[18] The game of reification is easy to play. Find a human behavior, label it, invent a psychic thing that is said to cause that behavior, name it or find a metaphor for it, and pretend you have an explanation of the behavior in terms of the psychic thing you posited. Sociobiologists play it when they note that humans behave spitefully and then posit a spite gene to explain spiteful behavior. The game is endless and obviously explains nothing. It is an utterly circular exercise. We explain behavior of a certain kind by whatever it is in the psyche that causes that behavior. Of course, there is no evidence that such a psychic thing exists or even that the behavior

is caused by the psyche. Obviously, since there are an indefinite number of human behaviors, archetypes can multiply indefinitely. A recent issue of *Wingspan* discusses the "archetype of the Green Man," an archetype that makes us act in an ecologically responsible manner.[19]

A similar game goes on in the mythopoetic movement when moral issues are raised. There is a tendency to identify immoral behavior as that behavior that is produced by immature archetypes. If the ego does not access the mature archetypes a number of nasty characters emerge: wife beaters, rapists, tyrants, flying boys, egotists, etc. "Patriarchy expresses what we are calling boy psychology. It is not an expression of mature masculine potentials in their essence . . ." (Moore and Gillette, pp. xvii, 13–42). Thus, we have encountered a circle of another kind, and it, too, is a dead end. Bad archetypes produce bad behavior. This sterile vision offers little information about what men should be except mature—whatever that means.

There is more than silly circularity at stake in these games. Not only do such reifications not explain why we behave as we do, they block more accurate and useful explanations. Let me illustrate with an analogy. Slave owners noticed that African slaves tended to run away. They posited a psychic factor that caused that behavior, a *love-of-running-away*. They then explained the running away by that psychic factor instead of the fact that slaves were human beings kept under inhuman conditions for the purposes of exploitation by their owners. Of course, one does not expect slave owners to have this much insight into the self-serving power relations of their own society, but the convenience of positing a tendency to run is too obvious.

Men, too, live in relations of power. Wife battering is one such relation. For centuries, many men got what they wanted from their wives by battering or threatening to batter them; it is still epidemic today. The fact is, that wife battering was and too often is a socially accepted way for men to control their wives. To neglect the gains from such power, to neglect the institutions which permit power to be gained in this way, and to attribute such behavior to immature archetypes or inadequate contact with real male energy seems at best socially irresponsible. Perhaps patriarchs, like slave owners, prefer to ignore social institutions, since, if the real causes of abuse are not addressed, men can more easily hang onto aggressive and controlling behaviors.

Similarly, vague admonitions to grow up—to move from an immature to a mature archetype—offer little moral guidance. Jack Straton's essay "Where Are the Ethics in Men's Spirituality" brings out the moral permissiveness of the mythopoetic movement.[20] In contrasting this movement with the pro-feminist movement to end male violence, Straton is able to note the

absence of any clear vision within the mythopoetic movement, whereas the pro-feminist men's movement has a reasonably clear analysis of why violence happens, what are the different kinds of violence, and what needs to be done to stop it.

Bly's essentialism blends into his moral permissiveness in such a way that he sometimes suggests that violence against women is justified and inevitable given the deeper male essence—which is aggression.

> And women today complain that men are too aggressive, but if we hadn't been aggressive 30,000 years ago, the tigers would have devoured all the women (cited in Straton, 10).

At another gathering a camper asked Bly what to do: "when we tell women our desires, they tell us we're wrong," Bly answered "So, then you bust them in the mouth because no one has the right to tell another person what their true desires are."[21] Ignoring the fact that in some contexts it is very appropriate to tell someone what they want or that they are wrong to want something, physical assault is never the appropriate response to such verbal criticism.

Bly claims that pro-feminist men doing antiviolence work are doing something important, but his message is blurred by other statements he makes. For example, in one of his earliest interviews on what men really want, Bly tells a story about a mother who gets knocked across the kitchen by her teenage son for no other reason than that she is a woman. But she does not take it personally, she just realizes he needs more masculine energy and she sends him off to his father (Bly 1982, 37). Thus, the mythopoetic moral message gets murkier and murkier.

The vacuous explanations and permissive moral vision of the mythopoetic movement totally fail to address issues of male power, privilege, and patriarchal supremacy. It looks in the wrong direction, and it does not seem to care. And, to the extent that some of the nasty archetypal behaviors are hardwired, it suggests that there is very little that can be done about them.

THE MEN'S RIGHTS CONNECTION

Anyone who is even casually familiar with both the men's rights movement and the mythopoetic movement will notice the natural alliance between them. Many publications such as *Man!*, *Men Talk*, *Seattle M.E.N.*, and *Wingspan* carry both men's rights and mythopoetic articles side by side. Authors

like Jed Diamond deftly weave men's rights and mythopoetic thought together. Rarely, if ever, do pro-feminist articles appear along with men's rights or mythopoetic articles. As Bly has noted the pro-feminist movement is generally hostile to both the mythopoetic and men's rights perspectives (Walters, p. 62). The bridges that make the men's rights connection are easy to find.

From Guilt to Shame

Antony Astrachan, in 1986, called the men's rights movement the no guilt movement, because the role of guilt, presumably dumped on men by women and society, is so prominent in the thinking of this movement (cf. Clatterbaugh 1990, 61–83). This guilt keeps men in their traditional and self-destructive roles. A man who feels guilty because he does not bring home enough income will work overtime. A man whose spouse always portrays him as the heavy will feel guilty and not stand up for himself. Shame plays an analogous role in the mythopoetic movement. The man who is made ashamed of his deep masculinity does not defend it; he becomes the wimp or the savage man. His warrior archetype is not strong enough to defend him against the shame dumped on him by his parents, especially his mother, feminists, and women whose essence is so different they cannot appreciate his deep masculinity (Bly 1990, 146). Women want men to be nice, but deep masculinity is not nice (Bly 1990, 8). Shame as it is used by the mythopoetics is the direct ancestor of guilt as used by men's rights advocates.

Fathers

Bly's essentialism leads him to declare that the father or some central male figure is necessary in the raising of sons. As we have noted, Bly has harsh words for women who are "sperm stealers" or who, even through good intentions, try to go it alone (Bly 1985). The men's rights literature—like Dan Quayle's speeches—is filled with the dismal statistics of what happens to children raised by single women. Of course, men's rights and mythopoetic literature—like conservative literature—never explore the possibility that low income or failure of the father to visit or pay support is a major cause of troubles that beset children in single parent homes. While the men's rights perspective sees men as alienated from the family because of guilt and "male bashing," Bly sees men as alienated from the family by male shaming.

Wounds and Harms

A striking similarity between men's rights literature and that of the mythopoetic movement is the listing of wounds or harms that serve as evidence of how tough it is to be a man. The favorite list of the men's rights movement includes the shorter life expectancy of men, male death in combat, male bashing, higher successful suicide rates, and anger at women who think they are spiritually or morally superior to men. Bly, too, lists many wounds that afflict men. Father wounds, mother wounds, wounds from not being initiated by men and from feminist shaming (Bly 1985). Bly's central message is to get down into the deep masculine and heal the wound (Bly 1985; Bly and Tannen, p. 33). The men's rights perspective seeks limits on women's power over men by requiring joint custody in divorce, setting up men's commissions, and ending male bashing; mythopoetics pursue the exclusion of women from male initiations so that men can heal wounds, many of them caused by women, and an end to the shaming of men.

Denial of Patriarchy

Both the mythopoetic and men's rights perspectives tend to deny the existence of patriarchy. Bly thinks that there are some fossilized remnants of patriarchy serving in Congress. But, he thinks that patriarchy is failing fast (Bly and Tannen, p. 33). If anything, he sees men as disadvantaged in society because of the successful women's movement, which has unleashed energy for women, but tends to make men into soft nice boys. The men's rights perspective also denies the existence of patriarchy; in fact, they deny the existence of male privilege and power.[22] Some men's rights advocates hold that patriarchy never existed, others hold with Bly that it once existed but that the women's movement created choices for women but none for men. So that men are now the new victims of sexism and oppression.

An interesting variation within the mythopoetic movement is Moore and Gillette's view that patriarchy equally shames both men and women (p. xviii). This view of patriarchy, while artfully dodging the institutionalized power of men, is highly reminiscent of the men's rights view that men and women are equally discriminated against; men are success objects and women are sex objects.[23] Thus, patriarchy is transformed into a system equally bad for men and women without noting that men primarily benefit and women suffer the greatest harms.

As a consequence of their views on patriarchy, neither the mythopoetic

perspective nor the men's rights perspective look at male privilege and institutionalized power as a source of the harms that come from the masculine role. Whereas it is standard fare in pro-feminist perspectives to explore the injuries to men from having to be the best, to take control, to be the powerful dominant member in a relationship, to have institutionalized social and political power, these get no mention as likely or even possible causes of the costs of masculinity. Perhaps the most glaring example within the men's rights perspective is the fact that in support of male oppression they note that almost all political assassinations are of men. *Surely*, political assassination is a consequence of patriarchal political power, not an indicator of the powerlessness or oppression of men.[24]

Male Positive Permissiveness

A frequent defense of the mythopoetic movement is that it is "male positive," it encourages men to come together and express their feelings. Men's rights perspectives also make this claim. Such a defense does not go very far, however, once such expressions are put into context—the denial of male privilege and power, the assertion of female power, the lack of specific anti-patriarchal guiding principles, the focusing on the wounds, and the ever present suggestion that women have very little to teach men. In this context, male expressions become either self-pitying complaints about male hurts or unchallenged and unguided expression of anger toward women. Mike Dash, a pro-feminist who sometimes attends mythopoetic gatherings, notes that when he talks about an experience informed by feminist analysis, he is accused of injecting politics into the discussion. But, when someone gets up and expresses an experience that is informed by men's rights analysis, it is accepted as nonpolitical and male positive. Being male positive within mythopoetic and men's rights circles has become, like being pro-white in David Duke's campaigns, a code word for being antifeminist.

A New Age, Old Time Religion

Bly does not hesitate to suggest that he is trying to bring back a sense of religion, in the old sense (Bly 1982, 51). It is helpful to take a hint from Bly's remark and see the religious aspects of the mythopoetic movement. Mythopoetic gatherings frequently remind me of a trip to a fundamentalist church; there is a lot of "witnessing." Men stand up and talk about their wounds and how they have found Robert Bly. The mythopoetic movement

also has the essential ingredients of religion; they have charismatic leaders (evangelists) in James Hillman, Robert Bly, Robert Moore, and Michael Meade to name some of the first generation figures. They have sacred texts in *Iron John* and *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover.* Religions typically support the values of the society that surrounds them, in this case, patriarchal values. Religions build by formulating a special language by which to talk about experiences, for example, God showed me something through a certain sign. The mythopoetic movement, as we have noted, uses the special language of archetypes and shame as explanatory. And, finally, mythopoetry provides a refuge from feminism; mythopoetic gatherings are closed to feminist critique; men are re-established as the focal point. Every religion needs to protect its members from evil, and the greatest evil for mythopoetics is the shaming of male nature (feminist critique).[25]

Bly may have succeeded beyond his wildest dreams in establishing a religion in the old sense. His emphasis on the wounds to men, the need to be deeply masculine, valuing traditional masculinity and father figures, excluding feminist critique, and finding guidance in traditional myths and stories has enormous appeal to politically active evangelical Christians. The 1990s has seen the emergence of a large Christian movement, the Promisekeepers, committed to a literal interpretation of the Bible and focusing on making men better traditional fathers and husbands. Robert Hicks, one spokesman for this movement, in *The Masculine Journey* has discovered the "Book of Bly" and interprets the message of the *Bible* as a story of men becoming kings, warriors, and lovers in order to overcome their wounds *a la* Bly.[26] Hicks' references in his book are almost exclusively to the writings of Robert Bly (mythopoetic), George Gilder (conservative), and Warren Farrell (men's rights). Bly, himself, qualifies as a zaken (sage), the most mature form of being a man, surpassing immature forms such as Hugh Hefner (phallic stage), Oliver North (warrior stage), and Jim Bakker and the Iran Contra indictees (wounded warriors). The warmth with which this movement embraces Bly's teaching says more about the traditional patriarchal roots of the mythopoetic movement than many pages of analysis.

DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES

The dangers of a movement that holds onto the old patriarchy with new language and metaphors are obvious. The essays in *Women Respond to the Men's Movement* reiterate the concerns of feminist women that mythopoetic

men will simply return to standard patriarchal roles now justified by deep masculine archetypes. These women express fear that many men are finding the mythopoetic movement attractive precisely because it avoids issues of power or challenges to men as the norm, and because it requires nothing from men except to articulate their hurts, many of which are blamed on women. They fear, quite rightly, a return to misogyny.

Pro-feminist men, too, find these dangers in the mythopoetic movement. But the mythopoetic movement may also be a disaster to the men who are caught up in it. If the above analysis is accurate, mythopoetic men are not looking in even approximately right direction for the cause of their wounds. Certainly some injuries come from personal relationships and from parents. But even these injuries are often embedded in a social and institutional context. The boy who is beaten because his father or mother accepts certain stereotypes about male behavior is also being harmed by widely held social stereotypes. If he is punished to bring him up to standards demanded by male leadership, the deeper cause of his harm is the power and privilege which he is supposed to inherit.

Men who refuse to see their collective and institutionalized power are more likely to mistake the cause of their concerns. For example, men who hold positions of enormous power over women, as landlords, supervisors, and bosses often complain that these women do not like men. If such men extend their attitude into their relationships outside of work, which they frequently do, they may conclude that all or many women do not like men. They say this despite the knowledge that many women are happily married or have close male friends. What these women do not like is the *power* this individual holds over them and the arrogance that too frequently accompanies power. But a man who sees only the hostility and denies that he has real power will assume that it is because he is male—he will never make the connection that that hostility is due to the power which he exercises. He will never understand that the end of his power and how it shapes him are the remedy for his hurt. Men who misidentify the cause of their wounds are doomed to never heal.

IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

There is much that the leadership of the mythopoetic movement could have done to thwart the patriarchal drift of the movement. There could have been a clear rejection of the men's rights perspective. There could have been a

clear appreciation of the fact that the stories used are blatantly sexist and that other stories need to be found or invented. There could have been more consciousness of the language that is used by the movement and that is disturbing to feminists. Bly himself seems to be of two minds about this language. On one hand, he suggests that words like "warrior" and "wild man" not be used outside the movement or apart from the context of the Grimm fairy tales, precisely because it will be misunderstood (Craig 1991). On the other hand, in a letter dated the same year he argues against *not* using "warrior" or "wild man" because he wants to force the listener to look at the positive side of these ideas (Bly 1991, 4).

Most importantly, there could have been an acknowledgment of the social reality of patriarchy. Probably nothing causes more feminist scrutiny than the mythopoetic denial of patriarchy and the accompanying denial of institutionalized male power.

Finally, the looseness of language and thought alarms feminists and their allies—"bust her in the chops"/the wild man is not dangerous/aggression is deeply masculine/stories are only to uncover the archetypes/the stories are sexist/don't blame women/steal the key from under your mother's pillow/mothers lie about their husbands to their sons. Of course, Bly is a poet, not a philosopher or a scientist, but as a poet who has license to use metaphors and tell stories, he of all people should be aware of the power of language to harm and frighten.

Mythopoetic men are increasingly occupied with counterattacking feminist critics. Instead of allowing that patriarchal roots are deep and that we all succumb to them in some ways, they seek to deflect *all* feminist criticism. Consider the following responses to *Women Respond to the Men's Movement:*

> The essays make me ask whether feminism, as it exists today, is part of a progressive agenda. The essays are filled with a reflex negative view of men, dogmatic preaching, ready-made judgements, endless fault-finding, and a rigid blinding ideology that makes men wrong no matter what. . . . The mythopoetic movement provided much-needed food for our weary souls (Smethurst, 2).

> Mythopoetics is not a feminist movement, and this is seen as a major failing by these women. . . . Outraged that men have needs not focused on women, needs met by turning toward male energy instead of toward the mother, these feminists angrily twist upon the . . . truths they have themselves discovered, and which men have taken to heart.[27]

These responses show a pervasive blindness to the patriarchal notions of their own movement; it is not that feminist women are upset that men have

needs or that feminist women are simply angry at a men's movement; it is that feminist writers see much more clearly than mythopoetic devotees the exposed patriarchal roots of the movement. These feminist writers have every reason to be concerned.

There is no immunity for anyone in a patriarchal society which contains a strong feminist movement. Ironically, adopting a defensive stance toward feminist criticism only increases feminist scrutiny.

The mythopoetic movement may be the largest of the various men's movements. Still, it is not very large. Most men drawn into it seem to come from a particular generation, a generation who rejected their fathers or who lost their fathers through divorce or death. The average age at a gathering is 40–42.[28] These men came of age during the new and vigorous feminist movements. Many are simply casualties of that gender revolution. Few men in their twenties and thirties are being drawn into the movement; they are more acculturated to a feminist presence.

In fact the mythopoetic movement may be short-lived. Its religious aspect makes it doubtful that the movement will survive much beyond the loss of its founding patriarchs. Furthermore, in a society which remains strongly patriarchal there are plenty of vents for the rage of men who feel like they have been displaced. There is the men's rights movement, the religious right's efforts to restore patriarchy, and politically conservative groups. There is growing empirical evidence that the movement is shrinking. Several major publications, *Man!*, *Wingspan*, *Men Talk*, have either suspended publication (*Man!* and *Wingspan*) or curtailed circulation. Attendance at conferences is also declining—the Austin men's conference declined from 700 men three years ago to under 200 at the last conference.

If I were to make one prediction about the future of the mythopoetic movement as presently constituted, it is that a substantial part of it will be captured by the men's rights movement. There is too much common ground between the two perspectives and the necessary ongoing feminist critique will lead to tighter nonfeminist and antifeminist alliances. Such a capture will drive out many men who are attracted to the mythopoetic movement precisely because it seems nonpolitical. The men's rights movement, on the other hand, is fighting a hopeless battle—claiming men are the real victims—based on a gross distortion of social reality and fanatical antifeminism (Clatterbaugh 1992).

Hopefully, that part of the mythopoetic movement that is not merged with the men's rights movement will be open to looking into the deep masculine, seizing the patriarchal archetype, and hoisting him out. Of course that would

require acknowledging the male privilege and power embedded in the traditional masculinity. Such an exorcism would be more truly healing, and the good news is that more and more men are doing just that.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Gazing into Men's Middles: *Fire in the Belly* and the Men's Movement

DON SABO

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT, "The fish are the last ones to discover the ocean." And so it is with men and patriarchy. Despite patriarchy's historical longevity and societal pervasiveness, men have failed to reckon with the fundamental realities of male dominance and social grouping by sex. Women have been trying to get our attention for more than a century. Lately, however, some men are beginning to hear the din of women's heady protests, anger, political and cultural dreams, and messages from the heart. Indeed, some men have begun to think about, feel about, and talk about themselves in new ways.

Sam Keen's book is an expression of the emerging critical dialogue around men and masculinity in American culture. I say "critical" in the sense that Keen isn't just flapping and yapping about male identity, male socialization, and the male experience because it's somehow become an academically correct discourse. Keen is problematizing men and masculinity. This means that, for Keen, there's something rotten in the ways that manhood has been defined, the ways that men spend their lives, the ways that men relate to one another and to women and to the planet. Right now, at this point in history, Keen says that men are part of the problem, not part of the solution. Men need to rethink their identities, their sexuality, their lives. Men need to change themselves and to reweave the latticework of their relationships. Keen knows that patriarchy has been a problem for women, but he also senses that patriarchy is messing up men's lives as well.

Keen's insights and basic arguments, and those of Robert Bly, the pied piper of the mythopoetic men's movement, are not new. Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Along with Simone de Beauvoir's *The*

Second Sex, which was published in the late '50s, these works signalled the beginning of modern women's critique of gender. In 1966, Myron Brenton published *The American Male*, a probing and critical analysis of men's changing lives and identities. Indeed, there have probably always been male critics of the patriarchal status quo who, one way or another, allied themselves with women and/or feminism. Frederick Douglass, for example, advocated for women's rights as well as abolition during the 1850s and 1860s. I suspect that the voices of these pro-feminist men were silenced in much the same ways that women's voices were silenced.

Keen's book is best seen, therefore, as an extension of critical dialogue around what might be called "men's critique of gender" or, in general, "the critique of patriarchy." It is important to see Keen's book as one voice in an emerging choir of male critics of gender issues for two reasons. First, it helps highlight some of the strengths of Keen's message. Second, by placing Keen's book in the wider flow of gender analysis and politics, we can begin to see some of its weaknesses.

GENDER IDENTITY AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Keen builds nicely on the fundamental insight that gender is a social construction.

Many of the characteristics that have traditionally been considered 'masculine'—aggression, rationality—are not innate or biological components of maleness but are products of a historical era in which men have been socially assigned the chief roles in warfare and economic order.[1]

There is a great deal of evidence that men's behavior and identity are not somehow standardized by biological determinants. Male domination of women, for example, is far from being culturally universal. There have been societies in which parity and respect existed between the sexes. We have also become aware that, within any culture, there is a variety of "masculinities" that comprise the tapestry of men's lives—some soft, some aggressive, some stoic, some expressive, some playful, some militaristic.

In his "brief history of manhood," he ponders "Man as Hunter," "Man as Planter," "Man as Warrior," "Scientific-Technological Man," "Self-made Man," and "Post-modern Man." Though Keen's quasi-historical, evolutionary taxonomy of manly types is guilty of oversimplicity and over-generalization, it does highlight the recognition that masculinity is not so much biologically ordained as it is socially and historically constructed.

THE POLITICS OF MASCULINITIES

Keen also does an excellent job of bringing home the observation that there is no such thing as masculinity—only masculinities. "Masculinity" is best viewed as a multifaceted mosaic and not a cultural monolith. Keen is helping us to realize not so much that the proverbial emperor has no clothes, but that there are a helluva lot of outfits in the wardrobe. There is much more going on here than cultural diversity. There is an obvious political relationship between the various models of masculinity that comprise the gender order. The prevailing forms of masculinity (i.e., hegemonic masculinity) reflect and reinforce traditional, patriarchal beliefs and social practices, thus reinforcing the status quo. Other kinds of more culturally and politically marginalized masculinities are geared to protesting, resisting, and transforming the realities of gender order. Today more and more men are engaged in struggles *inside* and *outside* themselves, which ultimately are serving to redefine and reconstruct their lives. The lines between personal and political are increasingly blurred in men's minds and, as a result, the gender politics that have always shaped so much of our lives are becoming more visible.

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

As I read through Keen's book, enjoying the clipped tenor and sometimes passionate warmth of its prose, I began nestling into self-preoccupation. I contemplated my masculine navel—though I never really did manage to fan the flames of a fire in my belly! I basked in manly self-reflexivity. By about page 150 or so, however, I began to sense that something was missing from Keen's textual landscape. There was a silence forming, and eventually it screamed loud enough for me to hear it. Where are the women? Listen to Keen's vision of manhood:

> At the center of my vision of manhood there is no lone man standing tall against the sunset, but a blended figure composed of a grandfather, a father, and a son. The boundaries between them are porous, and strong impulses of care, wisdom, and delight pass across the synapses of the generations. Good and heroic men are generations in the making—cradles in the hearts and initiated in the arms of fathers who were cradled in the hearts and initiated in the arms of their fathers (p. 185).

The absence of women from Keen's gender landscape first dawned on me for scholarly reasons. (Scholars read titles first and then footnotes.) Keen quotes, among others, T. S. Elliot, Dylan Thomas, Sigmund Freud, Albert Camus, Soren Kierkegaard, Aristotle, Karl Jaspers, Socrates, Herman Hesse, Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niehbur, and Jean-Paul Sartre. At times I felt I was listening to the roll call for a course in an all-male university called NEW AGE DISCOURSE 101. Where are the women? Has Keen read any of the thousands of books and articles by women that gave birth to the current rethinking around gender issues? Wasn't it women who initiated the dialogue around gender identity and the social and emotional costs of sex inequality? Does Keen owe any conscious debt to his feminist foremothers? And, if he does, why doesn't he recognize them? Why does he continue to reside in the intellectual long house of Western Androcentric Thought?

Take this line of thinking one step further. Let's depersonalize Keen the man and Keen the book. Why is it that the two bestselling books on men and masculinity (*Fire in the Belly* and Robert Bly's *Iron John*) present mainly men's ideas, men's words, men's existential rallying cries? I think that at least part of the answer for the stunning success of these books is the very fact that they leave women out of the emerging pictures of "now and future manhood" that are crystalizing men's heads. There is a strange contradiction at work here. On one hand, Keen and Bly do represent a sincere effort on the part of men to change themselves and their relationships with men and women. Yet, on the other hand, the silencing of women's voices and the slighting of feminist theory and practice speak of and reinforce gender separatism and male supremacy. Men historically and hysterically have loved patriarchal pageantry, the rituals of male bonding, and the blaring of masculine cultural trumpets, especially when men's voices drone out those of women.

There is yet one other indication of where women fit into the belly of Keen's thoughts and feelings. In the early stages of the book he argues that men are "unconsciously bonded to women." He then cloaks women in some rather grandiose abstractions: i.e., "WOMAN as goddess and creatrix," "WOMAN as Erotic-Spiritual Power." The problem with these kinds of mythic-proportion portrayals is that I don't recognize any real-life women in them. Keen is into some heavy intellectual air-brushing here. Even if I buy into the categories as intellectual constructs, I am not sure what to do with them, uncertain how they are going to help me live in a society in which 53% of the people are women.

Finally, after about 190 pages, in chapter 13, Keen does get around to dealing with the feminist critique. He describes feminist thought as a "kalei-

doscope"; a good image that speaks to the diversity of feminist thought and practice. But then, within a page or so, he takes the kaleidoscope and conveniently and simplistically splits it into two pieces; on one side there is "prophetic feminism," on the other side there is "ideological feminism." He defines "prophetic feminism (as) a model for the changes men are beginning to experience" (p. 195). He defines "ideological feminism (as) a continuation of a pattern of genderal enmity and scapegoating that men have traditionally practiced against women" (p. 195). Gee, that's odd, I thought feminism was an ideology and practice that was designed to expose, analyze, and seek to eliminate sexism, sex inequality, men's enmity and scapegoating of women. If you are confused, take comfort. Look at how Keen distinguishes between the two feminisms. "The distinction between prophetic and ideological feminism is largely a matter of mood, tone of voice, focus, emphasis, feeling-tone" (p. 195). Say what!?

Keen's commentary on feminism is the weakest part of the book. He oversimplifies, deals with 3 or 4 pieces of outdated feminist writing, has virtually no inkling of what feminist analysis is, where it has been, where it is, and where it is going. He just hasn't taken the time to do his homework. Also, when he is talking about the "ideological feminists," I noticed that his "tone" and "mood" are definitely angry. I wonder why.

JOURNEYING INWARD: NEW VISION OR OLD STORY?

Keen is right in arguing that men need to look inward and change themselves. He outlines a list of "heroic virtues" that can help men move from the " 'me' to the 'we', from the solitary self to community, from therapy to action in the everyday world." Men, he ably asserts, need to wonder more about being and becoming in the world. Men would do well to learn the skills of empathy, to develop a "heartfelt mind" that links thoughts with feelings, to be morally outraged by other people's suffering and to endeavor to do something about it, to enjoy life, to value friendships, to get back to the wilds of nature. With these virtues in head and heart, Keen indicates, the "now and future hero" is ready to complete Joseph Campbell's mythic journey in which "The hero comes back from (the) mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men" (p. 152).

With Keen, I believe that men will need these virtues in order to face and solve the problems and inequities of the post-modern disorder. Men will need to tap what has been best in traditional culture in order to transform

themselves and future culture. However, I have a small problem with Keen's list of virtues, which he sees as being essentially masculine in character and domain. I see them as being basically human mores and values that can be shared by or aspired to by women and men without ruminations about gender.

I have a much more serious problem with Keen's analytic rap and recipe for gender change. Too often, he seems to fall "down the well" of psychological reductionism, that the change process begins in or emanates from within the fires in men's bellies or the deep recesses of men's psyches. Human psychology is mainly a cultural phenomenon, a social construction. Men's psyches grow up in and out of the culture, society, and the political order: identity and behavior are less informed by myths than the product of political and economic circumstances. Any look inward into the minds and hearts of men, therefore, has got to recognize the interdependencies between psychic life, gender identity, culture, and social structure.

Because our culture is patriarchal in its historical origins and blueprints, and because our social structure is characterized by class, race, and gender hierarchies, this means that it is an illusion to separate personal change from institutional change. This is the dialectical insight contained in the feminist phrase, "The personal is political." Because the prevailing definitions of masculinity are collectively defined in ways that reflect and reproduce structured sex inequality, men who want to change their heads and hearts need to seek to change their institutional circumstances as well.

Keen counsels men to become "psychonauts" as he waxes and wanes about the inner journey of masculine rebirth. (As you read the following quotation, imagine a Gustav Mahler symphony is playing in the background, or perhaps the soundtrack from "Apocalypse Now.") Keen writes:

> The way of the psychonaut leads into the jungle of the psyche, into the heart of darkness. It is no less fearsome or fraught with perils than the outer path. . . . Because they have not dared to wrestle with anxiety, fear, hate, anger, pride, greed, longing, grief, loneliness, despair, impotence, and ambivalence, many extroverts bow obediently to authority and established opinion and never claim the territory of their psyche for themselves. . . . (T)he psychonaut must confront . . . nothing less than our fear of suffering and death and our attachment to pleasure.

Hey, Sam, lighten up a bit. I grew up worshipping a man in excruciating pain hanging on a cross; I don't want to be crucified myself in order to attain gender salvation. I feel like I have got to become some neo-Freudian Indiana

Jones, a New Age "raider of the Lost Ark" of manhood in order to get through to the metaphorical "other side" of the gender jungle.

The task of re-envisioning men and masculinity and changing men's lives has got to be more than a therapeutic exercise, getting in touch with one's feelings, or going off to the forest to beat drums with the guys. If men really want to climb outside their roles as the pimps of patriarchal history, we need to move beyond mythopoetic pomp and link with one another and with women in ways that substantially change the way we live and not just who we imagine we are.

WHAT CAN MEN REALLY DO FOR CHANGE?

Any realistic agenda for the transformation of gender relations has got to go beyond therapeutic vision and practice. Yes, we need personal change but, without changing the political, economic, and ideological structures of the gender order, the subjective gains and insights forged within individuals will erode and fade away. Personal change needs to be rooted in structure, and buoyed up by institutional realities. Without a raft or boat or some structure to hang on to, even the best swimmer will tire and slip beneath the waves. Within a framework that recognizes the structural as well as psychological interdependency of gender relations, Bob Connell (1991) has set up a modest platform for mustering countersexist action. I have added a few planks myself.[2]

1. Share the care of babies and young children equally between women and men. Change hours of work and promotion rules to make this practical.
2. Work for equal opportunity, affirmative action, and the election of women, until women occupy at least 50% of decision-making positions in both public and private organizations.
3. Support women's control over their own bodies, and contest the assertion of men's ownership of "their" women. Contest misogyny and homophobia in media and popular culture. Contest sexual harassment in the workplace.
4. Work for pay equity and women's employment rights, until women's earnings are at least equal to men's.
5. Support the redistribution of wealth and the creation of a universal social security system.

6. Talk among men to make domestic violence, gay-bashing, and sexual assault discreditable. Work positively to create a culture that is safe for women and for gays of both sexes.
7. Organize political and economic support for women's refuges, rape crisis centers, and domestic violence intervention.
8. Work to make the lives of marginalized groups of men better; e.g., gay men, poor men, homeless men, unemployed men, men in prison, men with AIDS, men who have been battered by (rather than profiting from) the war experience. These men have been economically and politically disenfranchised within the intermale dominance hierarchies that comprise the American gender order. Their individual and collective plight, at some level, perpetuates the privileges of male elites.
9. Take steps to rethink and stop male violence against men. Empathize with male victims of male violence. Stop the bar brawling and fraternity hazing. Don't sit back and let coaches put your kid at risk for acute injury. Don't let neighborhood gangsters and drug dealers steal your children's dreams and futures. Don't let the thugs in gray suits send your children off to Central America in order to protect "American interests." Recognize and seek to ameliorate the economic violence against minority men.
10. Work to heal the victimizers. Work with men who batter men, child molesters, prison rapists, and murderers. If they cannot be healed, then lock them up and try again through rehabilitative programs.

Fire in the Belly helped me understand a great irony that permeates much thinking and writing about the "new men's movement," especially the thinking that receives a lot of attention from the popular media. I mean the talk show stuff. It is ironic that Keen and Bly, the two leading proponents of the new men's agenda of the 1990s, recapitulate what is a traditional patriarchal refrain of maximizing men's identity with men via separation from women.

The real issue, I believe, is not that men need bonding with one another. It is that their traditional separation from women in patriarchal society has kept them from truly "bonding" with anyone—with men *and* with women. The separatist strategies for change that Keen lays out are at best good therapeutic advice and, at worst, a vehicle for perpetuating structured gender inequality, sexism, and the oppression of women, children, and marginal men. The chances of men going off together by themselves and then coming back and changing gender relations are

about as slim as if all the white people in South Africa or South Boston went off together in order to figure out how to end racism. They would come up with some new and powerful insights, there would be lots of new stirrings in their brains and bellies, but, in the end, alas . . . Personal change and political change are inextricably related. As men begin to take off their royal robes, they will do well to get both men's and women's advice on what to wear to the 21st century.

NOTES

1. Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (New York: Bantam, 1991), 65.

2. I am much indebted to Bob Connell's work on gender order and gender politics. Many of his ideas about Keen and Bly, and the state of the men's movement, are reflected in this review. Items 1 through 7 in the list are excerpted verbatim from his essay, "Men at Bay: The 'Men's Movement' and Its New Bestsellers." For detailed discussion of men and the "gender order," see Robert Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, The Person, and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

II

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: THE MYTHOPOETIC MEN'S MOVEMENT AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Men at Bay: The 'Men's Movement' and Its Newest Best-Sellers

BOB CONNELL

BOOKS ABOUT MASCULINITY on the best-seller lists. Satirical cartoon strips in the newspapers. Hundreds of men heading off into the woods to thump drums and wave spears. Primitive masculine rituals revived. Talk-show appearances. Strong men weeping about their fathers, their love lives, their lost sense of self . . .

Something is going on here; something odd, but possibly important. The underlying issues certainly do matter.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: FEMINISM AND MEN

The 'men's movement' and its Books About Men (a distinct genre of publishing now) are basically a response to the new feminism. To understand them one must start with what feminists have been saying about men over the past two decades. Feminist critics have pointed to inequalities of power, to exploitation, to violence and sexual abuse on a massive scale. The picture of men is not pretty.

Men do hold most of the power in society. Men generally control governments, armies, corporations, professions, political parties, and social movements. The evidence is easy to find. A few years ago I collected the figures on men's and women's participation in a range of national legislatures, militaries and judiciaries. The statistics are remarkably consistent. Men make up 95 percent to 100 percent senior office holders in these power structures, in all parts of the world.

Power is exerted in private life too. Men attempt to control women's sexu-

ality in a wide range of ways. They generally claim authority in families. The phrase 'head of household' was meant to apply to men; so was 'breadwinner.' Put these points about public life and domestic life together, and a general pattern emerges, where men hold most of the power and women are controlled.

It is not surprising, then, that there are massive economic advantages in being a man. More men than women have paid jobs. Among people with paid jobs, men, on average, get higher wages than women. Men control the large concentrations of wealth (look at any list of billionaires). In countries like the United States the majority of people with no income, or very low income, are women. In the 1980s researchers began to speak of 'the feminisation of poverty.' But in a basic sense women's economic disadvantage had been there all along.

On top of economic and political inequality there is extensive violence against women. Rape, often in the past dismissed as a consequence of sexual provocation by promiscuous women, has now been shown to be mainly about men asserting power. Research on domestic violence in the 1970s and 1980s uncovered a huge volume of assault by husbands on wives, traditionally ignored by police and condoned by public opinion. Street intimidation, workplace harassment, sex trades, pornography, misogynist advertising can all be seen as part of a pattern of men's abuse of women's bodies.

This adds up to a fairly tough indictment. The emerging picture of men was so uninviting that by the late 1970s many feminists had begun to emphasise women's difference from men. They argued that women should separate themselves from men as far as possible, and put all their energies into supporting other women.

Other feminists, however, saw a more complex picture. Gay men are aligned with women on some issues (though not all). Charges of rape against black men function as a means of racial oppression, which has its impact on black women too; this after all was the purpose of lynchings. A privileged minority of women benefit from their wealthy families' class advantages, and lead more secure and more comfortable lives than any working-class men.

As Lynne Segal shows in her excellent book about masculinity, *Slow Motion*, the divisions of race, class, and sexuality don't obliterate the basic feminist points about men. But they make the politics of masculinity much more complex than they might seem at first.

During the last two decades, large numbers of men in the U.S. and similar countries have become aware that they are under some kind of challenge. Often their idea of feminism is extremely vague, no more than a blurred

media image of bra-burning 'libbers.' But some men, especially middle-class men with higher education, became aware of the details, and learned that what feminists say about men is not just an invitation to loosen their sex roles and slip into something more comfortable.

Some of the men who have caught the message during the past two decades experienced a paralyzing guilt. Rather more men responded with complete denial. Others again have tried to work out better ways of relating to women; and from these attempts came the media image of the 'new man.'

THE 'NEW MAN' IN AMERICA: A SHORT HISTORY

Some of the first feminist Consciousness-Raising groups in the late 1960s had both women and men as members. When the Women's Liberation movement developed its emphasis on autonomy, mixed groups were abandoned. But some CR groups for men started up in 1970–71. For the next few years a small feminist movement among heterosexual men existed in the United States. Its members were supporters of feminism, often partners of feminist women. They took up issues about 'sexism', and tried to eliminate sexist attitudes and practices from their own lives. Some accepted the Gay Liberation analysis of the oppression of homosexual people, and tried to do something about homophobia too.

From this starting-point several streams emerged. Academic researchers, mainly psychologists, interpreted patriarchy as a question of 'sex roles' and set about researching the 'male sex role.' This research showed the existence of popular stereotypes about proper masculinity. It did not show very much else. But it provided a language for talking about men which avoided the tougher parts of the feminist indictment. The language of 'sex roles' suggests men and women are in parallel, not unequal, positions, and that men suffer from restrictive sex roles just as much.

Several authors in the mid-1970s began to create a popular literature about masculinity which suggested change in this 'role' was both easy and desirable. Books like *Men's Liberation* and *The Liberated Man* proposed that feminist ideas would benefit men. By abandoning their restrictive sex role, men would have fuller emotional lives, more inventive sex lives, closer relations with women and children, even better health.

If men were psychologically injured by their sex role, psychotherapy might be the answer. Through the 1970s another movement developed which I can only describe as 'masculinity therapy.' It consisted of a network of thera-

peutic groups, workshops and individual therapists, and it gave rise to a small industry of books with titles like *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege.* As this subtitle suggests, the therapy attempted to assuage the guilt set up by the feminist indictment.

This seems to have been a popular enterprise. A stream of masculinity-therapy books continued through the 1980s. The 'mythopoetic men's movement' has its roots in this milieu, and offers a kind of group therapy and a complete denial of guilt.

The idea of 'men's issues,' created as a mirror-image of 'women's issues' in the 1970s, soon turned into a defence of men's *interests* against women's. By the late 1970s a number of 'men's rights' groups had formed to oppose women in divorce and custody cases. Such activism turned to opposing women over jobs (against affirmative action), and over abortion rights (claiming father's rights over the fetus). Through the 1980s, heterosexual men's activism on issues of sexual politics increasingly showed an anti-feminist face.

The feminist impulse among men was not completely lost. Indeed, in some settings it had become very firmly established. Among younger intellectuals, for instance, shared child care and support for feminist principles are common. There is some very interesting U.S. research on the way these issues have been negotiated inside families and households—with some success, though unavoidable tension given the oppressive gender arrangements of the society as a whole.

Various men's groups and individuals have also become involved in more formal counter-sexist projects. They include opposing sexual harassment in the workplace, through union action; publicising the issue of domestic violence, and working with batterers to end their attacks on women; teaching men about gender issues through college courses; developing curricula and teaching strategies for schools; supporting women's defence of reproductive rights; providing support for gay community action around AIDS prevention and care.

The list is substantial, and indicates the range of possibilities for action by straight men. But it has to be said that most of these projects have remained small-scale, and they have attracted little media attention or public discussion. Given the political swing to the Right in the 1980s, this counter-sexist position has had little support from public policy, and often feels like an embattled minority response as much as it feels like the wave of the future.

The 'new man' is not quite a myth, but is certainly not a widely established reality. What is a reality is a new politics of masculinity, in which men's

involvement in sexual politics is openly debated. Enter, on the stage thus prepared, a poet with a message for troubled men.

FANTASY POLITICS: ROBERT BLY

Bly is a well-known American poet, white, married, presumably heterosexual. For the last ten years or so he has been giving lectures and leading workshops at which he has expounded a view of masculinity, its troubles and how to heal them. A definite movement has grown up around him. Bly has now put his ideas together in a book, *Iron John: A Book About Men*, which has become a non-fiction best-seller.

The book's framework is provided by a tale from the Grimms' early 19th century collection of Germanic folklore. 'Iron John' is a hairy wild man discovered at the bottom of a pool. The story tells of his relations with a prince who sets him free from a cage, goes into exile, fails certain tests, has his hair turned gold, and after other adventures marries a princess with the magical help of the Wild Man, who turns out to have been a king under an enchantment.

Bly discovers, in this little-noticed tale, a mighty allegory of masculinity and masculine initiation. Each chapter of his book picks up a few elements from the Grimm story. With the aid of Bly's personal reading of world history, anthropology, poetry and anecdotes of modern American experience, each element is expounded as a source of deep wisdom about men.

The themes Bly expounds are the loss of true manliness in modern culture; the need for men to be 'initiated' into manliness by other men, their symbolic or actual fathers; the need to separate from women, and revive ancient masculine rituals; the need to reclaim and celebrate the lost elements of masculinity such as the Warrior, the King, the Magician, and of course the Wild Man.

It is clear that Bly's story has a strong *emotional* appeal for a particular group of men, and it is important to consider why. There are two main clues. One is the texture and territory of the book. When you strip away the 'mythopoetic' superstructure, the central themes of *Iron John* are difficulties in emotional relations within the family, especially in boys' relationships with their mothers and fathers. This is, of course, the classic territory of psychoanalysis, and is currently the territory of a kaleidoscope of therapeutic movements and cults. Bly's movement, at a practical level, is simply the most ably marketed of a string of masculinity therapies that have appeared since the

early 1970s. It uses many of the techniques of group therapy, jazzed up with freshly-minted myth and ritual that invoke the primitive and celebrate masculine fierceness.

The second clue is the historical moment in which movement and book appear. They appear in a period of deepening political conservatism, *but* among the group of men—white, middle-class, heterosexual North Americans—who have been most impacted by the new feminism. Many men in this group are troubled about sexual politics, especially by the feminist indictment. Bly calls them, in effect, to stop feeling guilty about their privileges, to celebrate masculinity—and to get clear from women.

That point is the emotional key. Bly's reading of emotions in the family, which highlights fear of engulfment by the mother, fuels his central prescription for reform: build a separate men's culture. (His proposals are, ironically, a mirror-image of the separatist feminism of the late 1970s, which also discovered a mythic past and proposed to build a separate future.) True masculinity, Bly insists, is developed only by links between men. One of his most effective appeals is to his followers' feelings that they were let down by, or emotionally blocked off from, their fathers. The movement's emphasis on 'initiation' is very much about finding substitute fathers.

Getting clear from women is not only an emotional resolution, it is a political resolution for two problems at the same time. One is the feminist indictment. Men, Bly insists, are very different from women, and the difference should be emphasised and celebrated. Bly's story about the 'Wild Man,' his insistence on the importance of fierce, untamed emotion and bold action, his rhetoric about warriors and swords (and some of his followers' rhetoric about spears) must be read in the light of the feminist indictment of male violence. Bly clearly thinks that feminism has unmanned men, and he wants to de-wimp them. He is smart enough not to present himself as openly anti-feminist; the doctrine of separate spheres is his way around the problem.

At the same time this addresses another problem that has become acute for North American middle-class men in the last decade. The familiar rhetoric of American individualism has been worked up, by the ascendant Right, into a public celebration of aggressive individualism. The entrepreneur, the competitor, the self-made man, are trumpeted.

The problem is that this rhetoric corresponds very little to the realities of most white-collar working lives. (Even less for blue-collar workers of course; but working-class communities, both white and black, have some collectivist traditions that produce scepticism about this rhetoric.) Some time ago the German sociologist Claus Offe demonstrated, in a classic piece of social

science, that in the highly-organised, large-scale production systems characteristic of modern economies, it is impossible to get a rational measure of any individual's productive worth. The massive contradiction between the public exhortation to aggressive individualism, and a reality where most white-collar workers are unavoidably cogs in the economic machine, is neatly resolved by displacing the scene of action into a mystic cult of masculinity. We can't all be Donald Trumps, but, by God, we can be equally fierce in our hearts.

So much for Bly's emotional appeal. But where is this Pied Piper leading his troop? Given that Bly is now so much referred to as the last word on masculinity, we have to put some tough questions to him. Especially—is what he says 'about men' actually true?

IS BLY RIGHT?

There is, now, a body of research against which we can check his ideas. The result of the check is unequivocal: Bly is massively wrong. Four points about the book stand out.

First, Bly's level of argument is abysmal. For those of us who have been trying to get questions about masculinity on the intellectual agenda, it is deeply embarrassing to see such material publicised as the latest word about men.

It is not just that *Iron John* is a little cavalier with the facts. By any intellectual standards the book is appallingly bad: over-generalised, under-researched, incoherent (and at times self-contradictory). The text is packed with sweeping statements about what 'men' are, feel or need. Most of them have no basis in evidence or argument at all. Bly routinely ignores countervailing evidence (e.g., evidence of cultural diversity). He routinely distorts material from mythology, history, anthropology, even other people's poetry, to suit what he wants to believe.

It is difficult to document this without going on at tedious length. But for sheer verve it is hard to improve on claims like these:

> Hermes is the god of the interior nervous system. His presence amounts to heavenly wit.[1]

> We could say that a third of each person's brain is a warrior brain; a third of the instincts carried by our DNA relate to warrior behavior; a third of our

> thoughts—whether we like it or not—are warrior thoughts. This is a sobering idea. (P. 150)

> Robert Frost ate a lot of his shadow, which is certainly a part of his greatness. (P. 206)

> More trickster energy seems to be stored in the North American soil than in any continent in the world. (P. 228)

> Powerful sociological and religious forces have acted in the West to favor the trimmed, the sleek, the cerebral, the noninstinctive, and the bald. (Pp. 247–48)

Powerful stuff. (Bly, according to the photo on the dustjacket, is definitely not bald.) When Bly gets to talking about the world most of us live in, he consistently distorts the facts. Let me quote just two examples, from hundreds that could be used. The first comes in a chapter entitled 'The Hunger for the King in a Time with No Father':

> Kings as leaders of huge cities and empires, holding broad powers, are first noticed during the second millenium BC, in the city-states of Mesopotamia. No-one is sure if the Sun King in China preceded or followed the Mesopotamian king. The political king merges heavenly sun power and earthly authority . . . The Sun King and his Moon Queen . . . held societies together for about four thousand years. As principles of order, they began to fail in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe.

As a matter of cold fact, kingship emerged before the 2nd millenium; the relative chronology of Mesopotamia and China is quite well known, e.g., from carbon-14 dating (Bly didn't bother to look it up); the idea of universal sun monarchy (incidentally based in Egypt not Mesopotamia) was discredited as long ago as the 1920s; in many cultures kingship was not identified with the sun; many 'societies' existed between 2000 BC and the 18th century without kings of any sort (among them such obscure cases as Athenian democracy, the Roman republic, Venice . . .); and the mystique of European kingship was challenged before the 18th century (remember Machiavelli? Cromwell?). The passage is a farrago of error and misinterpretation; and this is typical of Bly's excursions into history. Here is what he does with anthropology:

> To judge by men's lives in New Guinea, Kenya, North Africa, the pygmy territories, Zulu lands, and in the Arab and Persian culture flavored by Sufi communities, men have lived together in heart unions and soul connections for hundreds of thousands of years.

The mind boggles. None of the cultures listed has lasted for 'hundreds of thousands of years.'

Bly isn't interested in the truth of what he says; he is interested only in its emotional effect. The effect of passages like this is to create a sense of continuity between his readers/hearers and an imagined stream of forefathers stretching back into the mists of the past.

To create this kind of effect, however, *requires* intellectual confusion, and this is the second point to be made about the book. To produce his myth of an over-arching male culture, Bly muddles together bits and pieces from different periods of history, different cultures, different modes of experience. He grabs a sun-king from China, an initiation ritual from Aboriginal Australia, a poem from Ireland, and throws them all into the blender. The resulting language, as the quotes show, is cloudy and abstracted, sustaining a prophetic tone at the expense of meaning.

At one point Bly invokes, and distorts, Yeats. (I resent this, Yeats being my favourite poet.) The contrast is telling. Yeats at his most prophetic still struggled for precision (think of those crystalline images in *Byzantium*). Bly settles for muddiness. His ambition is to talk, in Jungian terms, about recurrent masculine archetypes. Jungian cultural analysis is difficult, and needs a delicate touch to avoid stereotyping. Bly has all the delicacy of a beer truck. He never gets out of stereotypes, because he has no interest in the realities of the world.

The third point follows from this. The whole presentation rests on a stereotyped, outdated and now untenable concept of what masculinity is. Bly's underlying idea is that there is one basic masculinity, one pattern of true masculine rituals, one set of male psychological needs. At times he asserts that this masculinity is genetically determined (see, e.g., the Warrior Brain above).

The notion of a single masculine template is ethnographic and historical nonsense. Abundant evidence shows that cultural representations of masculinity, and men's actual ways of life, vary widely between cultures. They change in history, and they are diverse within any one culture at a given point of time.

Bly is dimly aware that there is a struggle going on over cultural definitions of desirable forms of masculinity. But he manages to ignore homophobia—a central feature of hegemonic masculinity in his own culture, as routine news reports of gay-bashing and AIDS hysteria illustrate. He manages to ignore the differences in men's lives produced by their class situations and by racial

oppression, let alone colonialism. He therefore misses most of the interesting issues about masculinity that have been raised in the last thirty years.

Bly assumes that the masculine template exists independently of women; that 'male values,' 'male initiation,' etc are *separate* from women's affairs; so in healing their wounds men must follow a separate path. There is, in fact, convincing evidence from ethnographic and life history research that masculinities are constructed in *interaction* with women. It is not just that cultural images of 'masculinity' are always defined in relation to images of 'femininity.' Real women, real women's work (in child care, housework, emotional support work, etc.), are intimately involved in making and re-making men's characters.

Fourth, to cap it all, the perspective is racist. Here I don't particularly have in mind Bly's explicit appeal to 'the Indo-European race' and its warrior heritage (p. 150); nor his astonishing stuff about the glory of golden hair, and gold symbolising genius and spirituality (p. 39, etc.) while black stands for evil, death and crude matter (p. 201).

I am more concerned with something central to the whole 'mythopoetic men's movement,' the invocation of a contrast between primitive and civilized peoples. The 'ancient' male rituals are supposed to have survived better among the former. Bly loves to cite snippets of anthropology to prove this. In the course of this, *all* non-western cultures get thrown into the 'primitive' basket, as we saw in the passage about pygmies and Sufis quoted above.

One would be more impressed with Bly's appeal to non-western cultures if he respected them enough to learn the details of their ways of life. He hasn't. The text is riddled with crude errors. Again, lots of examples could be given. As I come from Australia, I am particularly jarred by what he says about Aboriginal Australians. On p. 28, for instance, he says that 'the aborigines of Australia' (all of them men, apparently) follow a certain initiatory ritual, tell a story about 'the first man, Darwalla,' and knock out a tooth from each boy. Bly didn't take the trouble to find out the first fact about Aboriginal Australia, which is that there are hundreds of languages (700 different languages and dialects, by one linguist's estimate), and an equal diversity of rituals. On p. 165 he equips the Aboriginal initiators with swords, which have an edge that 'cuts clinging away from love, cuts boyish bravado away from manly firmness, and cuts passive-aggression away from fierceness.' Stirring words. A pity that Aboriginal Australian cultures were actually based on neolithic hunter-gatherer technology, and had no metal tools at all . . .

Basically, Aboriginal men are not real people to Bly, worth getting ac-

quainted with on their own terms. Like Zulus, Arabs and the rest, they are cyphers that fit into a particular slot in his imagination. When Bly's followers go into the woods to beat on drums, they are not respecting real African or American Indian traditions. They are enacting a stereotyped, basically racist, notion of the primitive.

Bly's muddled fantasy of masculinity might seem laughable, if all it led to was middle-class men sitting under pine trees and pretending to be bears. But I think it is more dangerous than that. Racist, myth-mongering, warrior cults of masculinity have existed before: in Germany in the 1920s, for instance. The mainstream Right is different now from what it was then, but its leaders can still find such ideas useful. President Bush recently came out in support of sex-segregated schools for black boys—a policy which if followed is certain to divide black communities and worsen problems of sexual politics, mainly at the expense of black women and girls. This diversion from the real problems of mass unemployment and racism is neatly legitimated by a discourse of masculinity that declares the key problem for young men is their lack of male mentors.

Bly is quite right on one major point, the key to his success. His readers are worried about sexual politics, and lack a language for talking about them. They lack this language precisely to the extent that they have refused to listen to the uncomfortable truths told by feminism and gay liberation. In the final analysis, *Iron John* and the 'mythopoetic men's movement' are a massive evasion of reality. Bly is selling fantasy solutions to real problems. What's worrying is that this evasion so easily opens space for far-right politics.

THERAPEUTIC POLITICS: SAM KEEN

Sam Keen has listened to feminists, and to gays, and has accordingly written a better book. *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* is much more literate and consequent than *Iron John*. Keen has some concern about offering evidence, and has some sensitivity to social conditions. He has heard about racism, homophobia, global inequality, and environmental issues. The book has some good passages of social and cultural criticism. He has practical experience in a men's group that has worked unpretentiously on consciousness-raising and sexual politics.

A Book About Men with these qualities is rare in the literature. I would rejoice over it, if it were not for the parts about masculinity.

Here, Keen's account is surprisingly close to Bly's. The basic territory is the same: the emotional needs of men and emotional relations in the family. Keen uses much the same method: speculative generalisation spiced with

snippets of history, anthropology, and contemporary anecdotes. Keen constructs a speculative and ethnocentric 'history of manhood' from the Stone Age to Postmodernism which is nearly as thin as anything in Bly—though to his credit Keen recognises the fact of continuing historical change.

Like Bly he draws on Jungian notions of male and female archetypes. Like Bly he argues that modern men lack initiation rituals, and proceeds to invent some to fill the gap. Like Bly he insists that men need to separate from women to do their healing; though some of the time he specifies that this applies to the archetype of Woman and not to actual women in the flesh.

However Keen departs from Bly about the form of separation. Rather than an all-male cult, Keen makes it an individual psychic quest, a 'pilgrimage.' Here he shows his closer relationship with growth movement ego-psychology. The political agenda Keen recommends is basically a therapeutic one: healing the male psyche, healing relations between men and women, healing the planet.

Using his practical experience in counselling and psychotherapy, Keen has some useful suggestions for the first step in this agenda. For instance he offers some sound practical tips on running a men's group. (Not very different, however, from what Farrell and Tolson were saying in Books About Men in the mid-1970s; the genre has little sense of its own history.)

But the impulse seems to run out at the second step. Keen doesn't carry us much beyond face-to-face relations towards the institutions and social structures that shape personal life. He doesn't have much sense of practical politics, nor useful advice about the grubby business of actually changing public policy about child care or housing, pay equity or the environment.

This disappointing ending is, in a sense, built into his analysis from the start. Keen draws on psychological traditions which have little room for what is now called 'the social construction of emotion,' the production of emotions (and emotional problems) by social structures and culture. One must ask, indeed, what 'healing' of masculinity is possible through the kind of individual psychic quest he advocates.

In my view it is very limited. Therapy of course has value for dealing with situations of crisis and despair. In less dramatic situations it often helps with sheer survival. But to *transform* emotional relationships, and a complex emotional structure like 'masculinity,' is inherently a collective project not an individual one. It must involve large numbers of people; it must deal with the institutions (e.g. the labor market, the State) which regulate men's lives; it therefore must centrally involve social action.

'Healing' is a metaphorical language for human relationships that has only

limited reach. To grasp adequately the project of changing masculinity we also need a language of 'justice' and 'equality.'

A PRACTICAL POLITICS OF GENDER FOR HETEROSEXUAL MEN

Bly, Keen and others in the genre are talking about real issues, however limited or mystifying the language they use. What would be an adequate, non-mystifying response to these issues?

The starting point has to be this: you cannot solve emotional problems about gender by ignoring the social conditions that give rise to them. Psychoanalytic researchers, from Jessica Benjamin and Dorothy Dinnerstein right back to Freud and Adler at the turn of the century, have shown in great detail how emotional tensions in masculinity grow out of the social arrangements that define a particular form of the family, and specify particular social positions for women and men.

What from one point of view is a feminist indictment of men, from another is a description of the social inequalities which have to be dismantled before either women or men can be 'healed.' This defines the central task for heterosexual men who want to do something constructive about masculinity.

Specifically, they have to go to work on each of the structures of inequality outlined at the start of this essay. Here is a modest agenda, building on existing activities of countersexist men in various parts of the United States:

1. Share the care of babies and young children equally between women and men. Change hours of work and promotion rules to make this practical.
2. Work for equal opportunity, affirmative action, and the election of women, until women occupy at least 50% of decision-making positions in both public and private organizations.
3. Support women's control over their own bodies, and contest the assertion of men's ownership of "their" women. Contest misogyny and homophobia in media and popular culture. Contest sexual harassment in the workplace.
4. Work for pay equity and women's employment rights, until women's earnings are at least equal to men's.
5. Support the redistribution of wealth and the creation of a universal social security system.
6. Talk among men to make domestic violence, gay-bashing, and sexual assault discreditable. Work positively to create a culture that is safe for women and for gays and lesbians.

7. Organize political and economic support for women's refuges, rape crisis centres, and domestic violence intervention.

This 'agenda,' obviously enough, involves work in other forums than the therapeutic men's groups preferred by Bly and Keen. It involves politics in the workplace and in the public realm. In other countries one of the most important forums for such work is the unions. The union movement is so weak in the United States that it is hardly ever noticed in discussions of masculinity; it is nevertheless important, not least because of its working-class base. Many prescriptions for 'changing men' come unstuck over issues of class, appearing as a middle-class guilt trip laid on working-class men. A realistic approach will recognise the importance of exploitation and powerlessness in working-class life, without wishing away the misogyny and violence that often go with them. The kind of agenda just outlined doesn't call on working-class men to add guilt to their other burdens. It calls on them to do positive things in the name of equality, which will benefit working-class women.

This is far from being the only program that could be drawn up; but it illustrates what might be involved in getting to the source of the problems. It is not an agenda for the nervous. There are problems here that are tough enough to engage the energy, fierceness, and creativity of a goodly number of men. Maybe some of the Warriors would care to come down from the hills and lend a hand in the cause of social justice.

This suggestion is not entirely a jest. A political agenda such as this, though it works to resolve emotional contradictions in the long run, is highly stressful in the short run. Quite frankly it requires heterosexual men to act against their own immediate interests. Activists will have to negotiate internal guilt and fatigue, suspicion from women, outright hostility from powerful men, and sometimes physical threat.

In these conditions, the techniques of emotional support worked out in the 'men's movement' might be very helpful for personal survival, and for sustaining a campaign. It would be nice to see these methods, and all this enthusiasm, put to better use.

NOTE

1. Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 143.

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The Politics of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement

HARRY BROD

In those days people shall no longer say: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."
Jeremiah 31:29

ROBERT BLY'S *Iron John* was on the syllabus of a course I taught recently on "Men and Masculinities." In my most cynical mood I found myself telling my students that reading this felt to me like reading one's daily horoscope in the newspaper. It was written in *such* abstract terms, with such leaping poetic imagery, that everyone can project so much of their own experience into it that, after reading it, they leave with the feeling, "My God, this is talking *exactly* about me."

I know this is unfair to Bly. I am both by professional training and personal temperament a philosopher, and what you may be hearing is another enactment of the age-old quarrel between the philosopher and the poet, as I play Plato to Bly's Homer. The philosopher wants everything spelled out in neat linear arguments; the poet resists. I find much of value in Bly's work. Men respond to him enthusiastically because he talks about things men feel a crying need to talk about—things no one else is discussing, at least not in a way most men can hear—and which have no airing in our culture. He answers real needs—for men to reach out across generations, for men to honor their fathers (though I confess I find myself nostalgic for the Biblical formulation, which at least told us to honor our fathers *and mothers*), for men to have a positive, assertive sense of self, for men to heal their grief.

The virtues of Bly's approach have been lauded elsewhere and often. In this essay I critique Bly's work and the practices of the movement which

claims him as at least a primary, and at times the preeminent, guiding light. I largely skirt the difficult question of the extent to which leaders must be held accountable for what followers make of their work. When I attended a workshop led by Bly and Michael Meade in 1988, I felt very uncomfortable, much more than I did with Bly himself. He told a number of "jokes," some at women's expense and some at men's. I found myself feeling a degree of tolerance for him personally, even while finding his sexist remarks intolerable. His comments seemed without personal animus, spoken in the tone of the poet sardonically commenting on the human condition. The all male audience laughed too much at the jokes about women, and too little at the jokes about men. I felt very much in the midst of misogynist male bonding.

Who are the men who are attracted to this movement? One segment responding to wild man and warrior imagery in the 90s consists of white, middle-class men who overdosed on sensitivity training in the previous decades. If these men have stopped contemplating their navels and have now reached down to their hairy feet, we may hope that eventually they will reach the ground and cease being "flying boys," as our mythopoets put it. This does seem a positive step. On a similarly positive note, I recall that, before the mythopoetic movement captured the public imagination, the phrase "men's movement," if it meant anything at all to most people, probably suggested the explicitly backlash "men's rights" movement. Whatever one thinks of the mythopoetic movement, it seems clear enough to me that they are better than *that.*

One phenomenon that has been insufficiently analyzed in understanding what attracts some men rather than others to mythopoetic gatherings is the large number of men who are veterans of various recovery and 12-step groups. (Michael Kimmel estimated the number to be about half at a large conference he attended.)[1] What accounts for this? Is it just that these men emerge from a therapeutic discourse which makes them more susceptible to the appeal of such gatherings? Should we look for some common set of underlying circumstances or personality traits that makes both movements attractive to certain men? Is our culture's gendered equation between (female) emotionality and powerlessness so great that men must lay claim to an identity of victimization before they feel it legitimate or safe to emote? Perhaps the many men who identify specifically as children of alcoholics or survivors of child abuse learned as boys certain skills of emotional sensitivity usually reserved for females. Has disillusionment with their own fathers stoked the fires of the search for the mythic father? These questions require further investigation.

One aspect of the mythopoetic appeal involves the issue of class. The movement attracts not only middle-class men, for obvious reasons relating to access to the time and money required for participation, but, more specifically, a high proportion of middle-class sons of working-class fathers.[2] Upward mobility requires that we turn our backs on our roots, that we psychically disown our families of origin and the work of our fathers. Much of the quest for the mythic father seems fueled by guilt over this venal betrayal of the real fathers, the banishing from sight, sound, and sense of their work and sacrifices, their accents, and their smells, in order for the next generation to "make it" and "pass" in these WASP, nonclass-conscious United States. The elder Minnesota farmer, Robert Bly, understands in his gut what these middle-aged urban professionals are missing from their lives as he takes them on weekend camping trips into the woods.

This is not the first time we have seen such a response from men who feel themselves under siege by what they perceive as an increasing and increasingly threatening feminization of their world. Michael Kimmel has analyzed what he calls the masculinist response to feminism a century ago in the United States. Men flocked to fraternal organizations: lodges, fraternities, clubs, and sent their sons to the Boy Scouts: "The reassertion of traditional masculinity resonated with antiurbanism and the reactivated martial ideal that characterized a strain of antimodernist sensibility at the turn of the century."[3] Sometimes one gets the feeling that there really is very little new under the sun.

Various aspects of mythopoetic practice need to be addressed. We are told that the key issue is the lack of personal initiation rites into masculinity. Other older and wiser cultures had such initiations, but we lack them. Hence, our problems. A number of things must be said about this. First, we need to look at history through a different lens than the one Bly offers. The history of masculinities, the history of men in families, at work, with each other, must be told as the history of patriarchy, or it is not truly being told at all. Without that perspective, we are in the presence of myth as falsehood, rather than myth as deep truth. I find an awareness of patriarchy utterly lacking in the story of our past which Bly and the mythopoetic movement tell us.

Yes, industrialization separated men from their families. And yes, we miss them. But industrialization was part of another process as well, the institutionalization of patriarchy. In preindustrial societies, patriarchs are men who hold and embody in their own person political, legal, social, economic, and religious power over the other members of their families. But with the shift

from preindustrial or precapitalist to capitalist patriarchy, this power is taken out of scattered individual male hands and centralized in more controllable and controlling collective institutions: the state, the market, the military. Theorists have developed various ways of describing this shift—some speak of it as a transition from private to public patriarchy.[4] We might speak not of patriarchy as the rule of the fathers, but of fratriarchy, the rule of the brothers, whose sibling rivalry is a form of competitive bonding that keeps things in the family of men.[5]

So why do men no longer receive personal initiation into manhood in modern societies? Why will there never be such rituals in modern societies, no matter how many devotees of mythopoetic practices clamor for them? Because individual manhood is no longer the fundamental site of the exercise of male power. Initiation is always initiation into authority. Today, the most important game in town, the club worth joining, is the depersonalized, institutional recognition of one's manhood. To those men who feel a lack of personal empowerment and who are looking for a male initiation rite to bestow it, I would say that this quest cannot be successful unless participation in personal rituals is combined with participation in a political movement to overthrow the capitalist patriarchal state, which is taking your power from you only to use it against you.[6]

Something else follows from this analysis of the institutionalization and depersonalization of male power under modern patriarchy. When those of us committed to feminist activism approach men with a statement like, "What you need to realize is that you are a powerful patriarch," they respond with, "Well, then how come I sure don't feel like one? How come I don't seem to have this authority over my own life, let alone anyone else's, that you're telling me I have?" There's something profoundly right in what they tell us, something many of us usually don't hear. Given the classical, preindustrial image most people have of the authority of real patriarchs, according to which a man is the king of his castle, these men are right—they *aren't* personally patriarchs in that sense, though institutional patriarchy and male power remain as powerful as ever. There *is* today a disjunction in men's experience, a contradiction between the facts of their power—of which we as a profeminist men's movement are aware but which are often not visible to men—and the feelings that men *are* aware of, those acute feelings of personal disempowerment. We serve no one, we advance no just causes if the only message we bring is that these men are simply wrong about their experience of power, or that they're not being honest, or that they suffer false consciousness. None of the standard, arrogant, elitist responses put

forth by those who think they're more enlightened works to persuade those they think are less enlightened. Similarly, we do no good if we tell men who say they have been helped personally by mythopoetic practices that they are somehow deluded or misguided about their own well-being because we, with our heightened political consciousness, *know* that they could not *really* have been helped. Our job is, rather, to explain the connection between how men experience their powerlessness but not their power under advanced capitalist patriarchy, in order to enlist their help in overthrowing this system.

We need further to eliminate the class bias through which we experience and evaluate men. For example, stereotypes supposedly characterizing *really* sexist men target working-class men, while middle- and upper-class men appear to be more "sensitive." The reality is that working-class people have only their personal power, so they manifest their prejudices personally. But those who hold institutional power let the institutions do it for them. Those who often appear personally "kinder and gentler," then, are often those who in reality are exercising greater patriarchal power. Analogous racial bias is evident when the term "macho," which carries many positive connotations within Hispanic cultures, is used by Anglos as a synonym for sexist behavior or attitudes. This is a case of white men using white privilege to deflect the critique of male privilege.

The mythopoetic men's movement is itself often ambiguous or confused about its own politics. This was illustrated in a panel discussion involving myself and Wayne Liebman, a mythopoetic men's movement leader, entitled "The Mythopoetic and Profeminist Men's Movements: A Dialogue," which took place at the Seventeenth National Conference on Men and Masculinity, sponsored by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), in Chicago in July 1992. Defending the mythopoetic men's movement against my political criticisms, Liebman argued that the movement *had* no politics, but was simply concerned with men's personal growth. When criticizing NOMAS's profeminist politics, however, he argued that the mythopoetic movement represented a *new kind* of politics. When I pointed out the contradiction he understood that he couldn't have it both ways. Liebman should not be personally faulted, but rather lauded for openly confronting a general lack of political awareness in the movement that he simply reflected.

Despite claims to be deeply rooted in the history of masculinity, the movement misses an opportunity to situate the contemporary father–son tensions that it is trying to heal in the context of our own recent history in the United States. In his essay, "The Vietnam War and the Erosion of Male Confi-

dence," Bly describes how the younger generation of men was deeply wounded by the older generation's betrayal and abdication of moral responsibility, the continuing effect of which is evident in our moral and spiritual decline.[7] The movement's neglect of this historical factor in its discourse is particularly striking given Bly's own writing in this essay and elsewhere on the impact of the war against Vietnam on intergenerational relations among men in the United States. It is this younger generation, whose sensibilities were formed during the Vietnam war, that now makes up a large percentage of the mythopoetic movement in the United States. By participating in our society's historical amnesia about Vietnam, the movement repudiates its own awareness of the deadliness of denial. It makes healing more difficult by prioritizing the honoring of the fathers over the healing of the sons.

The movement also often honors the fathers too much by placing the burden of father–son reconciliation on the sons. I recall how struck I was when I first read Bly's analysis of how sons collaborate with their mothers against the fathers. It pushed all my guilt buttons about my relationship with my father, and I was consequently about ready to sign on to this movement when I caught myself. For me, blaming my childhood self or my mother for the lack of closeness I felt with my father would have been blaming the victim. The (my) father's abandonment of interpersonal relationships within the family for the patriarchal rewards of the public sphere came before what Bly calls the (my) "conspiracy" between mother and son against the father. The misguided blaming of the victim denies the fathers' accountability, and thereby makes a true reconciliation impossible. (As far as relationships between particular fathers and sons are concerned, different fathers and sons will obviously bring different histories and resources to the encounter, providing different opportunities and responsibilities for each. Further, assignment of responsibility to the fathers must of course be mitigated by their *own* experiences as sons.)

While the mythopoetic men's movement criticizes the profeminist men's movement for, ostensibly, being motivated by guilt towards women, the mythopoetic movement recruits men into its quest for reconciliation with the father precisely by exploiting the sons' guilt over their lack of closeness with their own fathers. This from a movement that has supposedly moved beyond what it calls "the politics of guilt." The charge that its adherents are motivated by guilt would be better turned back on the mythopoetic men's movement itself.

The abuse of history by mythopoets becomes even more acute as we move

further back into the past, and ancient tribal rituals are invoked as models. Not all imitation is flattery. For example, I have reservations about appropriating Native American religious ceremonies for purposes quite foreign to their native use. When members of the dominant culture appropriate elements of a marginalized culture for their own purposes, it is quite different from appreciating that native culture in its own right—a distinction often lost on those who cite such appropriations to fend off criticisms of the whiteness of this movement.

Second, historical and anthropological evidence is invoked in a highly selective fashion. The brutality of many of these initiations, the way they demote women to secondary status, and the way many involve homosexuality are all ignored. Indeed, a key flaw in this movement is how much of its theoretical basis is derived from the dichotomous masculine and feminine gender archetypes it inherits from Jungian psychology that marginalize or eliminate gay perspectives. Further, its adherents sometimes cite the fact that, in their indigenous settings, women have certain supplemental roles in many of the initiatory rituals appropriated by the mythopoetic movement to demonstrate that their views are sympathetic to feminism. But these women's roles do not lessen the patriarchal structure of these practices. The subordinate always have *some* role in the system in which they are subordinated, but the system as a whole nonetheless serves the interests of the dominant group.

Finally, a more theoretical consideration. The archetypal psychology invoked by the mythopoetic men's movement often serves to make historically changing gender configurations seem static and eternal. This reification of gender contributes to the movement's political obtuseness, and its lack of sufficient attention to the issues I have raised above. My general interpretive framework for understanding gender is referred to in academic circles as social constructionist. Such a view holds that gender itself is artificial; the processes by which we become engendered are a function of manufactured difference being imposed on us. Any theory which tells us the solution lies either in a new, improved masculinity or in the recovery of some real or essential manhood cannot solve the problem, because that theory is itself part of the problem. It solidifies an idea of gender that needs to be dissolved. The question is not *how* we are to be men. Rather, the fundamental violation and violence done to all of us lie in the notion that men must *be* masculine, that masculinity is a goal to be attained.

NOTES

This essay originated in an opening keynote address delivered to the Sixteenth National Conference on Men and Masculinity, sponsored by the National Organization for Men Against Sexism and the Tucson Men's Cooperative in Tucson, Arizona, June 1991. I wish to thank NOMAS and the conference organizers for providing a forum for the exploration of these ideas. I also wish to thank Michael Kimmel for helpful comments. A briefer unauthorized version appeared in *Wingspan: A Guide to the Men's Movement*, ed. Christopher Harding (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

1. See Michael Kimmel, "The Men's Movement and Me" in *brother*, 1992.

2. A local study by Michael L. Schwalbe of the Sociology Department at North Carolina State University confirms this. Personal communication to author, June 1991.

3. Michael S. Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 3 (September 1987): 270–71.

4. Carol Brown, "Mothers, Fathers, and Children: From Private to Public Patriarchy," in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

5. See my "Pornography and the Alienation of Male Sexuality," *Social Theory and Practice* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 265–84.

6. An earlier version of this essay seemed to suggest that I saw personal and political activities as polar opposites, rather than being at least potentially complementary. I wish to thank Robert Bly for calling my attention to my oversimplification earlier.

7. Robert Bly, "The Vietnam War and the Erosion of Male Confidence," in *Unwinding the Vietnam War: From War into Peace*, ed. Reese Williams (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1987), 161–75.

"Changing Men" and Feminist Politics in the United States

MICHAEL A. MESSNER

IN RECENT YEARS, U.S. MEN HAVE RESPONDED TO—and at times initiated—changes in the personal and social relations of gender. There is an increasing cultural preoccupation with men's roles as fathers.[1] Gay liberationists and anti-sexist men are confronting heterosexism and male domination in society,[2] while some academic men contribute to the feminist challenge to phallocentric curricula.[3] Meanwhile, born-again Christians are subtly re-defining women's and men's "god-given roles,"[4] while conservative ministers hold popular seminars on "the meaning of manhood,"[5] and angry men (mostly divorced fathers) organize for "men's rights."[6] And as I write, Robert Bly's book, *Iron John: A Book About Men*[7] enjoyed over half a year on the national top ten best-sellers list.

Clearly, the question is not "Can men change?" or "Will men change?" Men *are* changing, but not in any singular manner, and not necessarily in the directions that feminist women would like. Some of these changes support feminism, some express a backlash against feminism, and others (such as Bly's retreat to an idealized tribal mythology of male homosociality) appear to be attempts to avoid feminist issues altogether. One thing is clear: Although these changes by men are not all feminist, the growing concern with the "problem of masculinity" takes place within a social context that has been partially transformed by feminism. Like it or not, men today must deal, on some level, with gender as a problematic construct, rather than as a natural, taken-for-granted reality.[8]

Although men are currently changing in a multiplicity of directions, the popular—and to a great extent, social-scientific—view of contemporary masculinity in the United States is that we now have basically two types:

the emergent emotionally-expressive New Man, who is heavily involved in parenting, and the inexpressive, hypermasculine Traditional Man. One (very conventional and optimistic) view is that the New Man is the wave of the future, while the Traditional Man is an atavistic throwback. Another (radical feminist and pessimistic) view is that the New Man is more style than substance, that he is self-serving and no more egalitarian than the traditional man, and thus does not represent genuine feminist change.

Both of these views of changing men are overly simplistic, but they are understandable, especially in the United States, given our lack of a sophisticated theorization of masculinity. In this article, I draw from recent theoretical insights to examine some current expressions of U.S. masculinity that have received a great deal of attention in popular media. Two general questions guide my analysis: (1) How can we assess the meanings and significance of contemporary men's changes? and (2) To what extent do the dominant expressions of men's changes support a feminist project of social transformation?

THEORIZING CHANGING MASCULINITIES

Until very recently, even the best of U.S. theorization of masculinity has been uncritically predicated on a role theory that posits a traditional "male sex role" vs. an emergent "new" or "modern" masculinity.[9] Though some U.S. feminists have criticized the limits of role theory,[10] it is largely social theorists outside of the United States that have constructed a theory through which we can begin to assess the shifting meanings, styles, and structures of masculinity.[11] These theories make two points that represent a major break with role theory. First, masculinity and femininity are not fixed, static "roles" that individuals "have," but rather, they are dynamic relational processes. Masculinity and femininity are constantly re-constructing themselves in a context of unequal, but shifting, power relations. Second, there is no singular "masculine role." Rather, at any given time, there are a multiplicity of masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity—that form of masculinity that is currently ascendant and dominant—is constructed not only in relation to femininities, but also in relation to subordinated and marginalized masculinities.

My discussion below relies heavily on Lynne Segal's recent analysis of changing masculinities, aptly titled *Slow Motion*.[12] In taking power as the central dynamic in the construction of a multiplicity of gender identities and relations, Segal avoids the simplistic and overly-optimistic "men's libera-

tionism" of the 1970s that viewed almost any changes by men as a sign that men were embracing feminism, and the pessimistic belief by many 1980s radical feminists that violence and domination are an expression of some natural male essence. Segal is realistic in that she recognizes the continued existence of men's multi-level oppression of women. But she is optimistic in that she refuses to view this oppression ahistorically or as fixed in men's and women's biological essence. Instead, she insists on viewing men's dominance and women's subordination as a historically grounded relational system, in which women continually contest men's power. Moreover, following Connell, she views masculinity and femininity not as singular, fixed, and dichotomous "sex roles," but rather as contradictory and paradoxical categories, internally fissured by class, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and other systems of inequality. The facts that women often contest men's power, and that some men oppress other men, create possibilities for change.

But how can we conceptualize "change"? In this article, I briefly examine three changes in U.S. masculinity that have received considerable attention in print journalism, television, and film: The New Fathering, the mythopoetic men's movement, and the increase in the prevalence of highly successful men weeping in public. I argue that these phenomena represent highly significant (but exaggerated) shifts in the cultural and personal styles of hegemonic masculinity, but these changes do not necessarily contribute to the undermining of conventional structures of men's power over women. Although "softer" and more "sensitive" styles of masculinity are developing among some privileged groups of men, this does not necessarily contribute to the emancipation of women; in fact, quite the contrary may be true.

NEW FATHERS AND CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS

In the early 1980s, Friedan announced the arrival of a "quiet revolution among men," and Goode cited what he saw as a "grudging acceptance" by men of more egalitarian gender relations.[13] Two interrelated phenomena fueled this optimism: First, public-opinion polls indicated that the majority of men were in favor of equal opportunities for women in public life, and increasing numbers of men—especially young men—expressed a desire for egalitarian relationships with women. And second, the 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of the cultural image of the New Father, a man who placed family relationships—especially the care and nurturance of children—ahead of career goals.

By the mid-to-late 1980s, evidence suggested that the view that men were embracing feminism may have been grounded more in shifts in what men *say*, rather than in what they actually *do*. Today, many young heterosexual men appear to be more inclined than were their fathers to "help out" with housework and childcare, but most of them still see these tasks as belonging to their wives or their future wives.[14] And despite the cultural image of the "new fatherhood," and some modest increase in participation by men, the vast majority of childcare, especially of infants, is still performed by women.[15]

How do we explain the gap between what many men say (that they are in favor of egalitarian families, that they want to be "involved fathers") and what they do? One possible explanation is that their publicly-stated opinions are inauthentic presentations-of-self that can be viewed as attempts to conform to an acceptable image of the New Father. Indeed, Eliasoph argues that opinions expressed in polls often tell us more about how people construct public selves than they do about people's genuinely held attitudes about public issues.[16] Along these same lines, some feminists today speculate that many men's publicly expressed egalitarian attitudes about gender issues might prove to be "a liberal 'gloss' on a generally more conventional outlook."[17] In this view, it may be in men's interests to change their words, but not to change their behaviors in any substantial manner.

It is probably true that some of the men's publicly-expressed gender egalitarianism is inauthentic, but evidence suggests that there is likely more to it than that. Recent research on fathering—much of which includes qualitative research in addition to opinion polls—indicates that many young men today truly desire greater involvement and connection with their children than they had with their own fathers.[18] But why, then, does this desire so rarely translate into substantially increased involvement? Segal argues that the fact that men's apparent attitudinal changes have not translated into widespread behavioral changes may be largely due to the fact men may (correctly) fear that increased parental involvement will translate into a loss of their power over women. But she also notes that men who truly desire to share parenting find that it is difficult to do because of the continued existence of ". . . external and social as well as internal and psychic factors."[19]

The "internal" constraints on increased paternal involvement include deeply-held psychological fears and ambivalences surrounding intimacy and nurturance.[20] But recent research on "men who mother" suggests that men's "psychological incapacity" to care for and nurture infants has been over-stated and may be as much a myth as women's "natural maternal in-

stinct." Drawing from Russell's survey of "a host of relevant studies," Segal notes that "the most remarkable finding about reversed-role parenting with full-time fathers is how little difference it seems to make to the children, female or male, *which* parent parents."[21]

Although we should not minimize the extent to which women and men are still differentially prepared to parent, men's psychological and emotional constraints can apparently be overcome if social conditions are conducive to substantially increased paternal involvement and responsibility. Most important among the "external" structural constraints to men's increased parenting are the demands of men's wage labor. Men with young children are likely to work more irregular hours and more overtime hours, while the opposite is true of mothers.[22] This reality is reinforced by the facts that women earn substantially lower wages than men do, and that there is little (often no) childcare or parental leave provided by employers or by the state in the United States.[23]

Thus, although a small proportion of fathers today are choosing to parent equally with women, increased paternal involvement in childcare will not become a widespread reality unless and until the structural preconditions exist. Rosanna Hertz found in her study of upper-middle-class "dual career families" that egalitarian divisions of family labor did not develop because of a commitment to feminist ideologies, but rather, as a rational (and constantly negotiated) response to a need to maintain his career, her career, and the family.[24] In other words, career and pay equality for women was a structural precondition for the development of equality between husbands and wives in the family.

However, Hertz notes two reasons why this is a very limited and flawed "equality." First, Hertz's sample of dual career families where the woman and the man make roughly the same amount of money is still extremely atypical. In two-income families, the husband is far more likely to have the higher income. Women are far more likely than men to work part-time jobs, and among full-time workers, women still earn about 65 cents to the male dollar, and are commonly segregated in lower-paid, dead-end jobs.[25] Thus, most women are not in the structural position to be able to bargain with their husbands for more egalitarian divisions of labor in the home.[26]

Second, Hertz observes that the roughly egalitarian family division of labor among dual career couples is severely shaken when a child is born into the family. Initially, new mothers are more likely than fathers to put their careers "on hold." But eventually, many resume their careers, as the childcare and much of the home labor are performed by paid employees, almost

always women, and often immigrant women or women of color. Thus, the construction of the dual career couple's "family equality" is premised on the continued existence of *social inequality,* as a pool of poor women performs domestic labor for relatively low wages. In other words, some of the upper-middle-class woman's gender oppression is, in effect, bought off with her class privilege, while the man is let off the hook from his obligation fully to participate in childcare and housework. The upper-middle-class father is likely to be more involved with his children today than his father was with him, and this will likely enrich his life. But, as Segal observes, given the fact that the day-to-day and moment-to-moment care and nurturance of his children is still likely to be performed by women (either his wife or a hired, lower-class woman), "the contemporary revalorisation of fatherhood has enabled many men to have the best of both worlds."[27]

ZEUS POWER AND THE NEW MAN

Just as with the New Father, the more general cultural image of the New Man is based almost entirely on the lives of white, middle-, and upper-class, heterosexual men. What we are witnessing is a shift in personal styles and lifestyles of privileged men that eliminate or at least mitigate many of the aspects of "traditional masculinity" that men have found unhealthful or emotionally constraining. At the same time, these shifts in styles of masculinity do little, if anything, to address issues of power and inequality raised by feminist women. For example, the "gatherings of men" organized by Robert Bly are based on the assumption that young males need to be "initiated into manhood" by other men in order to get in touch with "the deep masculine," an instinctual male essence. Echoing his masculinist predecessors at the turn of the century who also feared a "feminization of society,"[28] Bly states that "when women, even women with the best intentions, bring up a boy alone, he may in some way have no male face, or he may have no face at all. The old men initiators [in tribal societies], by contrast, . . . helped boys to see their genuine face or being."[29] Bly virtually ignores an entire generation of social-scientific research that demonstrates that masculinity is socially constructed.

It is important, but not too difficult, to criticize Bly's curious interpretations of mythology and his highly selective use of history, psychology, and anthropology as "bad social science."[30] Perhaps more needed than a critique of Bly's ideas is a sociological interpretation of why the "mythopoetic men's

movement" has been so attractive to so many men in the United States over the past decade (thousands of men have attended Bly's "gatherings," and as mentioned above, his book is a national best seller). I speculate that Bly's movement attracts so many U.S. men *not* because it represents any sort of radical break from "traditional masculinity," but precisely because it is so congruent with shifts that are already taking place within current constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Many of the men who attend Bly's gatherings are already aware of some of the problems and limits of narrow conceptions of masculinity. A major preoccupation of the gatherings is the poverty of these men's relationships with their fathers and with other men in workplaces. These concerns are based on very real and often very painful experiences. Indeed, industrial capitalism undermined much of the structural basis of middle-class men's emotional bonds with each other, as wage labor, market competition, and instrumental rationality largely supplanted primogeniture, craft brotherhood, and intergenerational mentorhood.[31] Bly's "male initiation" rituals are intended to heal and reconstruct these masculine bonds, and they are thus, at least on the surface, probably experienced as largely irrelevant to men's relationships with women.

But in focussing on how myth and ritual can reconnect men with each other, and ultimately with their own "deep masculine" essences, Bly manages to sidestep the central point of the feminist critique—that men, as a group, benefit from a structure of power that oppresses women, as a group. In ignoring the social structure of power, Bly manages to convey a false symmetry between the feminist women's movement and his "men's movement." He assumes a natural dichotomization of "male values" and "female values," and states that feminism has been good for women, in allowing them to reassert "the feminine voice" that had been suppressed. But, Bly states (and he carefully avoids directly blaming feminism for this), "the masculine voice" has now been muted—men have become "passive . . . tamed . . . domesticated."[32] Men thus need a movement to reconnect with the "Zeus energy" that they have lost. And "Zeus energy is male authority accepted for the good of the community."[33]

The notion that men need to be empowered *as men* echoes the naiveté of some 1970s men's liberation activists who saw men and women as "equally oppressed" by sexism.[34] The view that everyone is oppressed by sexism strips the concept of "oppression" of its political meaning, and thus obscures the social relations of domination and subordination. "Oppression" is a concept that describes a relationship between social groups; for one group to be oppressed, there must be an oppressor group.[35] This is not to imply that an

oppressive relationship between groups is absolute or static. To the contrary, oppression is characterized by a constant and complex state of play: oppressed groups both actively participate in their own domination and they actively resist that domination. The state of play of the contemporary gender order is characterized by men's individual and collective oppression of women.[36] Men continue to benefit from this oppression of women, but, significantly, in the past twenty years, women's compliance with masculine hegemony has been counterbalanced by active feminist resistance. Men, as a group, are not oppressed by gender, but some certainly feel threatened by women's challenge to their power. Men are also hurt by this system of power: we are often emotionally limited, and commonly suffer poor health and a lower life-expectancy than women. But these problems are more accurately viewed as the "costs of being on top."[37] In fact, the shifts in masculine styles that we see among relatively privileged men may be interpreted as a sign that these men would like to stop paying these "costs," but it does not necessarily signal a desire to cease being "on top."

In addition to obscuring the oppressive relations between the sexes, and thus positing a false symmetry between women's and men's "movements," Bly's workshops also apparently do not question or challenge hierarchies of intermale dominance based on class, race, or sexuality. It is predominantly white, middle-aged, middle- and upper-middle class, and heterosexual men who attend these men's gatherings. Indeed when, several years ago, I was invited to a meeting of "mythopoetic followers of Robert Bly," the man who invited me attempted to lure me by enthusiastically whispering to me that "these are all *very* successful men!" Clearly, Bly's "men's movement" is so popular among relatively privileged men because, on the one hand, it acknowledges and validates men's experiences of pain and grief while guiding them to connect with other men in ways that are both nurturing and mutually empowering. On the other hand, and unlike feminism, it does not confront men with the reality of how their own privileges are based on the continued subordination of women and other men. In short, Bly facilitates the reconstruction of a new hegemonic masculinity—a masculinity that is less self-destructive, that has re-valued and re-constructed men's bonds with each other, and has learned to feel good about its own "Zeus power."

THE POWER TO CRY IN PUBLIC

A large part of the naiveté about the emergent New Man is the belief that if boys and men can learn to "express their feelings," they will no longer feel

a need to dominate women. The idea that men's "need" to dominate others is the result of an emotional deficit overly psychologizes a reality that is largely structural. It does seem that the specific kind of masculinity that was ascendant (hegemonic) during the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism was extremely instrumental, stoic, and emotionally inexpressive.[38] But there is growing evidence that, today, there is no longer a neat link between men's emotional inexpressivity and their willingness and ability to dominate others. For instance, shortly following the recent Gulf War, U.S. General Schwartzkopf was lauded by the media as an example of the New Man for his ability to show his compassion (he unapologetically shed a tear in public) for the U.S. men and women who were killed, wounded, or captured. But this "new" emotional expressivity did not supplant a very "old" style of violent, dominating masculinity: As he was showing his feelings for his troops, Schwartzkopf was unsuccessfully urging President Bush not to stop the war too early. Following his hero, the Carthaginian general Hannibal, Schwartzkopf argued that "we had them in a rout and we could have continued to reap great destruction on them. We could have completely closed the door and made it a battle of annihilation."[39]

In recent years there does appear to be an increase of powerful and successful men crying in public—Ronald Reagan shedding a tear at the funeral of slain U.S. soldiers, basketball player Michael Jordan openly weeping after winning the NBA championship. It might be, ironically, that crying in public (at situationally appropriate moments) is becoming a legitimizing sign of the New Man's power. On the other hand, public crying for women—for instance when U.S. Representative Patricia Schroeder shed tears during a press conference while announcing her decision not to run for President—is still viewed as a sign of women's "natural weakness."

The easy manner in which Schwartzkopf was enthusiastically lauded as a New Man for shedding a tear in public is indicative of the importance placed on *styles* of masculinity, rather than the institutional *position of power* that many men still enjoy. In fact, there is no necessary link between men's "emotional inexpressivity" and their tendency to dominate others.[40] Men can learn to be situationally expressive while still very efficiently administering the institutions from which they gain their power over others. Representative Schroeder, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, tells the story of how when she regularly visits military bases to assess their needs, the generals and admirals privately tell her that their "number one need" is childcare facilities. But when these same generals and admirals address Congress, their stated needs are ships, planes,

tanks, and weapons systems. Childcare disappears from the list. Powerful men's public performances, after all, are staged primarily for each other. And though shedding a public tear for one's fallen comrades in war may now be an accepted part of the public presentation of hegemonic masculinity, there is still very little willingness among powerful men to transform the social institutions within which they construct their power and privilege over others.

BEYOND STYLE TO POLITICS

Lynne Segal's theorization of masculinities challenges us to ". . . move beyond the methodological individualism of all psychological thinking . . . to see that the relative powers and privileges that most men may still take for granted are not reducible to any set of facts about individual men." The key question, she suggests, is "under what social and structural conditions will men be encouraged, induced, or forced to change in ways that support feminist goals of equality and justice?" Since it is highly unlikely that all men—or even the majority of men—will actively support feminism, I would state the question even more specifically: "Under what social and structural conditions will *particular groups of men* be encouraged, induced, or forced to change in ways that support feminist goals of equality and justice?" This is an inherently political question.

Segal identifies the state and the economy as two key sites of political struggle. State social-welfare policies, parental leave and childcare programs, workplaces transformed by affirmative action and comparable worth, and the creation of democratic working conditions are structural changes that are necessary both to empower women and to encourage (or force) men to change in ways that are consistent with women's emancipation. Segal and other socialist-feminists have observed that the United States has the most regressive state policies and workplace structures when compared with other industrialized nations, and thus women's quest for equality there has moved at a snail's pace.[41]

This raises an important (but certainly not a new) question: What does it mean to be in favor of socialist-feminist transformations of the state and the workplace in the United States, given the weakness of our unions and given the fact that we have virtually no socialist or feminist presence in our government (especially at the federal level)? One answer is that "change" in the United States takes place less in the conventional political realm that in the

arenas of culture and personal lifestyles. This is particularly true when we examine the most visible forms of recent change in U.S. masculinity. I have suggested that middle-class New Fathers, Mythopoetic Wild Men, and weeping generals are real and significant changes (i.e., they are genuine responses to real limits and dangers that many men face). But these changes represent a shift in the style—not in the social position of power—of hegemonic masculinity. In fact, I have suggested that these shifts in style might in some cases serve as visible signs of men's continued position of power and privilege vis-à-vis women and less powerful men.

Does this mean that all of men's changes today are merely symbolic, and that they ultimately do not contribute to the kinds of changes in gender relations that feminists have called for? It may appear to be so, especially if social scientists continue to collude with this reality by theoretically framing shifts in styles of hegemonic masculinity as indicative of the arrival of a New Man, while framing marginalized men (especially poor black men, in the United States) as Other—as atavistic "traditional" men. Instead, a feminist analysis of changing masculinities in the United States might begin with a focus on the ways that marginalized and subordinated masculinities are changing.

This shift in focus would likely accomplish three things. First, it would remove hegemonic masculinity from center-stage, thus creating a view of masculinities that emerges from a different standpoint. Second, it would require the deployment of theoretical frameworks that examine the ways that the politics of social class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality interact with those of gender.[42] Third, a sociology of masculinities that starts from the experience of marginalized and subordinated men would be far more likely to have power and politics—rather than personal styles or lifestyles—at its center. This is because men of color, poor and working-class men, and gay men are often in very contradictory positions at the nexus of intersecting systems of domination and subordination.

Though it is beyond the purview of this article, I briefly suggest here some key questions that future studies of changing masculinities might begin with: To what extent are working-class men, when confronted with issues such as comparable worth, identifying not simply as "men," but with women as "workers?"[43] To what extent are Black, Chicana, and Asian women and men successfully linking feminism with struggles against racism?[44] We can ask similar questions about gay men's roles in feminist and sexual politics. Gay men—especially those who are white and middle class—often share much of men's institutional power and privilege, while at the same time undermin-

ing a key component (heterosexuality) of hegemonic masculinity. There is evidence that some gay men identify with conventional masculine power, and would simply like to incorporate homosexuality into the definition of hegemonic masculinity.[45] On the other hand, for the past twenty-plus years, gay men have been in the forefront of pro-feminist men's organizations that have supported feminist political struggles. For instance, gay men's recent active participation in the defense of women's abortion clinics against anti-choice demonstrators suggests a sophisticated political understanding of the mutually interlocking nature of gender and sexual oppression. It is precisely this sort of analysis and political practice that is necessary if today's changing masculinities are to contribute to the building of a more egalitarian and democratic world.

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NOTES

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